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STORIES



GODS of VENUS
by RICHARD S. SHAVER

FR JONES

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VOLUME 22

NUMBER 3

All Stories Complete

GODS OF VENUS (Novel—\$7,000).....by Richard S. Shaver..... 8

Illustrated by Rod Ruth

Big Jim Steals went off on a honeymoon with his bride, Ceulne, into the wildest section of Venus—and found there a mechanical woman who lived!

THE EGG OF TIME (Short—3,500).....by Millen Cooke..... 124

Illustrated by Robert Fuqua

Time is an unknown thing. It would seem to be inflexible. But Edmund Letimer didn't know that—all he knew was that he could control it....

EVERYTHING BUT THE SINK (Short—4,000).....by Berkeley Livingston..... 132

Illustrated by Rod Ruth

Flying seucars, hey? Well, here's a guy named Senro who ought to know all about it! They've been flying past his ears for a good many years!

FLESH AGAINST SPIRIT (Short—3,500).....by Alexander Blede..... 140

Illustrated by H. W. McCaulay

This is a story of two kinds of people—live people and dead! And it's a mystic story looked at from a viewpoint of scientific (?) possibility.

Front Cover Painting by Robert Gibson Jones, illustrating a scene from "Gods of Venus"

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The OBSERVATORY

..... *by the Editor*

WE HAVE an exceptionally long novel for this month—87,000 words. It's called "Gods Of Venus" and it's by Richard S. Shaver. It's pure fiction, although a sequel to his "Venus cult" stories, and continuing the adventures of Big Jim Steel. We might say that it does carry Mr. Shaver's convictions, and that he inserts items he believes to be true wherever they fit. So, for those of you who object to us calling our stories true (whether they are or not!) let's call this one fiction, and let those who can recognize the true portions (if any) dig them out for themselves. Actually, though, the yarn is a tremendously exciting one, and we feel that artist Rod Ruth has illustrated it as no other novel in our book has ever been illustrated. Please let us know what you think of illustrating the stories this way. And if you want a tip on the story itself, Rod Ruth said he was fascinated by it.

BERKELEY LIVINGSTON has come up with one of those "flying saucer" stories, and this one's very funny, we think. He took the news stories literally, and wove them into a very sweet fourth dimensional yarn. We are sure you'll get a belly laugh out of this, besides recognizing the yarn as a typically good Livingston effort.

"THREE Egg Of Time," by Millen Cooke, is one of those rare time-travel stories which delights the eye of an editor. Yessir, here's a new slant on time, believe it or not, and darned well written. We congratulate Millen Cooke on a brilliant effort, and we hope she'll come again with more of the same.

LAST story in our issue is "Flesh Against Spirit," which is more or less of an experiment with us. You might almost call it mysticism. It's about a fourth-dimensional people who are not flesh and blood, but spirits, in the sense we always accept the word spirit. And the story's about a war between spirit people and flesh people. As Alexander Blade said when he turned this in: "I decided to try to be the poor man's Rosicrucian in this one. You can bounce it with gusto, if you wish." Well, we didn't bounce it. It read very well, and was interesting. And what more can a story do? Maybe it'll make you think, too. We

do, sometimes, about subjects like this, and we wouldn't be surprised if almost everybody does.

ALMOST all of our readers have read of the feud that exists between your editor and a group of "fans" who delight in panning everything he does. Well, it seems all the boys are interested in science fiction, and they have a definition for it that disagrees with ours. Generally we tell 'em to go jump in the lake, but recently Rog Phillips came to us with what he called "a fan column" for AMAZING STORIES. Well, why not? So, in "The Club House" you'll find a new department in AMAZING STORIES giving the doings of the fans who have clubs all over the country, and reviews of the little magazines they publish concerning science fiction. Therefore, we'll let Rog Phillips write it, and we'll stay strictly the heck out of it! Besides, it gives us a chance to yell our heads off in the rest of the magazine, and maybe a good fight will liven up the proceedings. Go ahead, boys, enjoy yourselves. This is a free country, and we advocate free speech. And maybe, just maybe, our readers would like to know about fan doings, and follow your magazines. Your editor remembers when he was an AMAZING STORIES fan, and he was editor of a fanmag called "Science Fiction Digest" which, for your information, was the best darn fanmag ever published. So there!

NEXT month we are going to do it! Do what? Prove the Shaver Mystery, of course. Yes, we now have a portion of the proof. We still can't produce a dero, or a cave, but dammit, we have something that you can sink your teeth into! We will present pictures, objects, and documents. And we'll give you the most sensational news story ever released in this country. Further, we defy anybody to deny it, or to disprove it. We will give you facts, and we'll then point to the Shaver material. You can draw your own conclusions as to the truth of the *unproved* portions of the mystery. But where there's one apple in a barrel, there could reasonably be more. We've got several apples. Don't miss the big April issue. It's our 22nd anniversary too! The April 1926 issue was the first AMAZING STORIES to hit the stands. It's the granddaddy of science fiction, and the old aristocrat, and it'll be around 22 years from now—take it from us!

—Rap

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GODS *of* VENUS

by RICHARD S. SHAVER



Rod Ruth

Scientists and technicians took down the thought records of the



dying giantess as she whispered to me, "I give you the secret of life!"

Behind the word symbols which I use is the abstract living thing that is my thought—which you must seek and fully sense—or be unaware of the reality of my being—and thine.

Elder Writings

LEFERN, Amazon city of the Tuon Confederation, hangs upon the mighty sky-piercing forests of Venus, flings a pearlhung web of magic across the massy limbs and green billowing vastness of growth, as far as an eye can see.

Gigantic evergreens, huge as grandparents of Redwoods, Ponderosas of growth, support the endless intricacies of plastic cable-suspensions and gleaming spheres of Tuon dwellings, pearl upon pearl, emerald upon silver, magic web upon the ever-living green of the undying forest.

The jeweled harness of the Amazons glitter prismatically with the smooth, dancing motion of the long, graceful limbs and the slim, strong, womanly bodies moving along the cables as casually as an Earth man walks a pavement.

Naked, artfully tattooed, sensuous, strong, active bodies, racing on errands vital to the welfare of their world, as well as the welfare of earth. Weapon-harness, their only garments!

For, speeding in search over the whole pearly, cloud-wrapped planet, girt with scarlet seas, over the far-spreading forests and snow-topped mountain ranges; the vast war-fleet of the Tuon Nation searches with its penetrative augmentive rays for the survivors of Hecate's forces. Hardly a ship remains upon the landing platforms above the tree-webbing Tuon cities. They are scattered over the whole of Venus like a great grid of sensitive eyes—and in her office in Lefern, the Amazon Queen, Oanu waits, holding all the strings of communication in that far-flung grid listening for some clue to the whereabouts of the missing immortals of Hecate's vampire crew. The wearers of the dreaded gold and scarlet robes of the inner circles of the Hagmen must be destroyed to the last man!

Oanu, Chief of Secret Police, Commander of the War-Fleet, near to totalitarian ruler of Lefern, strong hand in the council of the Federated Cities, sat at her desk, aimlessly toying with the belt of her jewel-glittered harness.

Her eyes flashed, moved to the broad transparent section of the plastic wall that

was her window. The seamless sphere of the building was here rendered transparent.

She looked out upon the gleaming webs of single cable walk-ways, at the graceful speeding forms of her people running along the cables with their unbelievable grace and sureness.

Up and down and around her eyes swept. Softly she communed with the vital strength of the trees, vast columnar trunks pillaring, upholding forever, supporting—her city! Lovingly her lustrous eyes caressed the gigantic fronds, the buttressing roots jutting out and down, the whole vast vitality of the forest which was the breath of life and beauty to her.

Night came to the city of Lefern. The soft white breasts of the ever-clouds seemed to press lower, billowing strangely as of something dreadful passing invisibly inside their unending blanket.

Down from out the billowing grey envelope of clouds, shining softly in the view screen before Oanu flashed a small flyer. It leveled, landed on the great artificial structure suspended from the upper limbs of the great trees.

She smiled, for she knew that in the water-filled ship sat the great, beautiful, erect-crested figure of Lt. Oltissa of the Mer-navy. Lt. Oltissa had been a central figure in the defeat of the mighty Hecate's organization. Oanu had great respect for the mind and character of the huge Mer-woman. She touched a stud on the screen; over the ray went her thought:

"Lt. Oltissa, chief Oanu speaking. Can I help you?"

"You can, my loved friend. Rout out the two love-birds, the Big Steel man and the dancing bird, Ceulna. Their marriage plans will have to wait. Hecate is dying within hours in the laboratory where her mind has been under intensive search for her knowledge of the ancient secrets. There is something she wants to give him, a map to a treasure, and she will give it to no one else but him. We want to humor her, since she is at the point of death—besides it may be important information!"

SO IT was that my lovely dancer bride-to-be and myself, Big Jim Steel, left Lefern with air helmets on our heads, sitting in the warm water-filled interior of Oltissa's speedy fighting spacer, lifted into the night, up and up, clear of the cloud

piercing tops of the Ygdrasil—rivaling trees, above the cloud envelope, into the clear stratosphere's biting cold, and winged steadily across the cloud-floored sea of air.

Far out over the teeming Venusian seas Oltissa sent the ship hurtling to the death-scene of Hecate, the terror of two planets for centuries, but now stripped of her power, dying from lack of the young blood upon which she had fed for untold years exclusive of all other food.

Behind us, in the night, Lefern lay, a great web of shimmering magic upon the mighty forest, covered with the deep blanket of darkness and the star-gilded billowing blanket of the cloud-envelope.

* * *

Oanu watched us go on her screen, sent the rays reaching after us till we were out of sight. She sighed, for Oanu envied us our happiness. Sighed, and then smiled: for she thought of Hank Farne, sleeping in her quarters, his urchin smile impudent even in sleep; and with the thought; swung the great watch-ray upon him. Which she should not have done, for the watchers of Lefern were few these days, and the fleet was scattered over the whole globe. The usual guard ships, which always floated on levitor beams over Lefern, had also been released for search duty.

Far out in the dark forest, as she turned her watch-ray upon Farne in his sleep and bent musing over the drifting dreams of his mind in the screen . . . far out in the forest a shaft of light flashed upward for just an instant of deadly signal. At the base of that shaft a renegade Red warrior from the hot-belt smiled a sinister, vengeful smile.

Oanu had forgotten that this was the love-season of the Amazons. The repressed desires of the warriors of Lefern were unleashed. Discipline, as it always did in this season, relaxed.

Oanu had been the only watch-ray doing her duty that night. The others lay in passionate embrace near their posts with the newly arrived Tuon males from the male city of the Tuons called Rrfion. Oanu had forgotten too many details of her duty since Farne's return, herself. Lefern, for minutes that night, lay without defense. Across the unwatched screens of the sky-spanning watch-rays glided a long black needle of speed . . . high . . . a tiny point of greater blackness among the stars over

the cloud envelope. Those precious minutes when chance would coincide to divert the many eyes from the screens of watching rays had been awaited for weeks. Hanging, far out in space, the black ship had waited for the chance that the laws of probability said must occur at least once. The departure of Oltissa's ship, the far swing of the great search-beams watching the departure of the friendly ship of the Sea People, the momentary relaxation afterward when each of the fifty minds at the watch rays had turned to love or to something else for a moment—that simultaneous relaxation of all attention over the whole guarding net-work of beams spelled Lefern's doom that night.

DOWN from the cruel speeding needle trailed a thin yellow cloud, like burning gases, like tenuous ever-burning flame. Deadly, spreading, the thick white clouds dissolving beneath its yellow fall, it left a wide path in the center of which lay Lefern, defenseless! Down settled the wide yellow band of deadly ever-fire. Far sped the slim needle of battle, and Lefern noticed it not at all. Out of sight of the Amazons' eyes, perhaps forever out of sight of those eyes which would not see, now, in time, anything at all.

Within the *Warsprite* Hagmen laughed a long hideous ululation of vaunting, exulting triumph. Nonur spoke:

"Death is upon them, and they do not even know! The radioactive sand idea from the stupid earth-men's laboratories is wonderful, is it not? Now, if we had but some method to divert the watch-rays of the other Tuon cities as did the Sea-Peoples' ship tonight in Lefern, we could finish the job tonight! Have you an idea, my Montagna?"

"I have been thinking that a radioflare, a warning beacon similar to that a falling ship releases to indicate its position to searchers, dropped nearby, might divert the watch-rays just long enough to permit our single pass across their stratosphere. We could try it. These Amazons are in their love-season, their minds are dull with passion, duty is to them disagreeable during this time."

On sped the dark needle of Nonur's vengeance, pausing once over each Lefernian city to release a deadly load of treated sand. For a year no earth touched by that

falling sand would support life. Wherever it fell, there fell complete death—a slow, agonizing death of rapid aging.¹

Day followed day. Night followed night. A week . . .

* * *

Aimlessly Oanu, Chief of Operations and Commander of the War-fleet of the Tuon

¹ Just such a silent attack from the stratosphere by radio-active sand may be the end of America. Especially if they listen to the lying ray-voices which many officials think are the "super" secret service (U.S.) of a science they THINK is modern. And they do listen, to the voice that says—"we will guard you with rays, keep off the ships that hear your doom!" BUT they do not KNOW the doom will be kept off, they only BELIEVE it will!

Not that all ray voices are lies, but what does an official who may not even speak of this "super secret" officially, know of the *truth* of such secret work. Are our leaders *believing* these secret voices while young Americans are condemned to mad-houses for asserting they have heard the same kind of voices—and that the voices lie and torment—are not even sane in many instances!

The Shaver mystery IS important. Watch what officialdom *does* with it, how they ignore and yet humor us in our wild assertions, wonder why they think they can ignore anything so vital to our safety. Are we betrayed by official stupidity to the control of a secret ruling clique without the mental ability or the necessary good intent to protect us from horrors as radioactive sand from the planes of rival nations? Watch what becomes of Palmer and Shaver and all connected with this sensational exposé of unseen secret policies and forces of our national life. It will tell you much, warn you of vitally important dangers. What becomes of us in the future will tell you whether these secret powers in the deep rocks of Mother Earth are our friends or our enemies—whether it is their policy of death to all who speak of them—or whether they want to be our friends, to help our race develop. It will tell you if the secret ray-groups of Earth are our friends or our enemies if this attempt to bring the ancient secret out in the open fails or not. And if we die in some accident, remember it was NOT an "accident." Remember to leave this nation to its evil secrets—and go where a man can speak of such things openly—to Stockholm or to the Arctic where few rays live in the caverns underneath. For this secret of ray is an EVIL secret, the greatest use of those rays is medical—to deprive the surface people of these beneficial rays and surgical techniques is an evil monopoly of vitally important health methods. As for the pleasure-rays, they are not necessarily demoralizing, but they ARE when in evil hands. These things must become public knowledge, those mechanisms must be studied openly by all science!—Author.

Nation, emergency ruler of Lefern, Head of the Intelligence Division, and once-lovely official Host at the great Tuon celebrations of the Love-Season, pushed back her chair.

The disciplined, supple lines of her figure had relaxed, sagged, the whole lovely sensuous figure deflated into an ugly sack of skin hanging in horrible folds upon her shrinking bones. Some ugly force had drained the life-matter, the vitality and youth out of her.

With but a vestige of her grace of a week ago, she rose, felt with a feeble hand for the desk edge, moved wearily to the broad, transparent section of the plastic wall.

She looked out at the glittering web-ways criss-crossing endlessly, empty of life. At the gigantic evergreens, seeking with her perishing spirit for some uplift, some vital strength to come to her out of the loved pillars of the trees. Her lack-luster eyes caressed the gigantic fronds and buttressing roots, the scent and feel of the loved forest.

"At least *you* will live, great ones. Your vast life will not be quenched by this evil dust from the hidden enemy. If only my ardor to find them had not sent so many ships on search patrols—the city would have had protection. But who could have known she would venture out so soon—so very soon after such utter defeat? How could our guard rays have missed her . . .

Even as she spoke with her cracked old voice to the stillness of the forest, a sudden thundering crash came from that far-reaching stillness!

Overhead fell the rolling noise of descent of vast thrashing weight upon and through the springy barriers of bending limbs.

Down past her startled, dimming eyes plunged a limb from the sky-challenging tops, so far overhead the ever-clouds usually obscured them.

A hundred feet long and heavy with its fern-like fronds, down and down—struck a taut emerald plastic cable with a sound as of a gloomy God's hand plucking at a tragic harp . . . a harp of doom in Oanu's ears. The limb was flung up and out and plunged down again, end over end, into the muck far below.

Oanu's eyes welled with the easy tears of the aged. A week had made an old woman of her resilient, capable self!

Her tears were occasioned by a swift, close glimpse of that falling limb. The green fronds had been leprosus with white

blotches of decay, the wood rotten with great grey streaks and new, glistening fungous growths. The blight of the sand had struck even the mighty strength of her beloved forest!

Softly her voice, a week ago warm and full of all the delicious tones of vital womanhood, now prematurely cracked with age from the radio-active dust-plague loosed by the still concealed fugitives of Hecate's broken hordes, cursed all the creatures of Hecate's forces down to the last will-less evil carcass that had served her until forever poisoned of all virtue.

As she turned wearily, hopelessly from the great window, she tightened the belt of the jeweled harness that once had fitted snugly, caressing her smooth round hips.

Now it hung, too large and grotesque upon her in its prismatic beauty. Gaudy it seemed, accentuating her hideous decay.

CHAPTER II

*Reality is what you perceive it to be.
So be you greatly enough aware thy
perceived reality approaches reality.
Otherwise you may NOT dream of
TRUTH!*

Elder Writings

UNWARE of the doom settling even now over our loved Lefern, Lt. Oltissa, of Mer; the beautiful Ceuina of the Tuons, her eyes shining her love and the excitement of her coming marriage to myself; and myself, Big Jim Steel, Earthman now accepted into the Tuon nation as a citizen and warrior, dived into the deep waters of the Venusian sea.

We spiraled down, pressure near crushing the ship, but within it we were comfortable, for these submersible water-filled spacers of the Mer-people connect only indirectly with the outer waters. Within, the pressure automatically adjusts itself to both air and underwater travel.

We entered the great pressure locks of the submarine city of Merdepon. From it we followed Oltissa's swift-swimming form clumsily through the water-filled streets of the city—entered the great laboratory center.

Now we walked in air, for here was the chamber prepared for the last days of Hecate. Oltissa, Ceuina and I stood once more before the feared figure of Hecate.

This air-filled chamber, where we took off our helmets, was deep within one of the Sea People's largest and oldest cities, as well as the capital of their vast state. Merdepon, the city, capital of Merdeponal, the state.

It was a great laboratory, fitted up for the purpose of getting Hecate's centuries-old wisdom from her while the opportunity offered. The work was necessarily rushed, for age was sweeping away her strength. Not for any consideration would she get another drop of the blood from young lives needed to keep her alive.

In the center of the room, surrounded by busy scientists and technicians taking thought-records and asking detailed abstract questions of her unresisting mind, sat the mighty Hecate, no longer mighty.

As we approached, a cry of horror was wrung from me. A pity sprang into my breast in spite of my loathing for the giantess. Without her blood stolen from doomed children, age mounted almost visibly through her body.

Shriveled to a greater cadaverousness than any mummy ever exhibited, life still glowed in her yellow eyes, but nowhere else on her shrinking bones was there much evidence of it. Over her played the extremely potent beneficial rays of the science of the mer-people, for it was not yet time for her to die. There were still things they might learn from her long life of delving into the science of the Elder Race. I knew that those rays alone held vitality in the body that had cheated death so long.

The huge bones of the Hecate's neck, covered now only by the folds of grey skin and the shrunken, twisted muscles, moved slowly as she tried to hide her face from my eyes. The last gesture of nearly insane vanity in the creature that had been the powerful and ruthless Hecate was the last breaking thread that still bound me, had so bound me to her will with such strength for so long a time. At last my mind was free of the compulsion her witcharts had put upon me.

"It could have been you and I, Big Steel," she murmured, half to herself, for her mind was fast passing into the mists of death. "Lords of Two Planets, Immortal as the Gods—but luck turned against me. Still, I have a gift to give you. It can make you greater than ever I was—it is a gift of life, and it has not the taint

that the blood of children gives. . . . It is a forgotten formula and a very strange and wonderful machine. I have not had time to study it fully, but I am sure it contains the secret of life. In this locket is the micro-map of its location!"

For an instant the mighty spirit that had driven her through the awful obstacle of time itself for so many centuries blazed forth from her yellow eyes.

"I must warn you . . ." Her voice failed, and for an instant she struggled with weakness. But it was gone, the last iota of energy, and only a dying gigantic woman remained, no terrible all-powerful Goddess, no *Kali* sweeping over the race of man with bloodshed and terror and consuming power—only a loathsome thing that lived on blood and could not get any. My heart rejoiced in the release her fall had brought to me. I took the locket from her fingers, turned, tucked it into a pocket of my jeweled harness.

WITH Ceulna on my arm, we left the dying thing, who gazed after us with a vacuous, mournful, ludicrous expression. Ceulna and I were to be married as soon as we could manage it, were to live in the beautiful tree-city of Lefern. That vast city of emerald cable webs hung with pearly globes suspended from the gigantic trees of Venus forest was to be our home. We entered a tiny ship, a two-seater that Oltissa had arranged to be given us as a wedding present from the Sea People. It was a beautiful sample of the Elder work, and no modern copy; one of the spoils of Hecate's fall.

We spiraled upward, the sea water glistening on the stubby wings as we entered the air, flashed upward into the great cloud ceiling. Up and up Ceulna sent the powerful, indestructible craft, until we shot out into the glorious upper air, and the whole vast white billowing cloud-sea lay below, transcendent, argent, beautiful and pure as new snow on earth.

Curiously I opened the locket which the dying vampire had given me as a parting gift. Inside was a series of tiny micro-film maps. I got a lens from the map-locker, pored over the minute, detailed engravings.

It was a map of southern Venus, that area that lies on the southern hemisphere, surrounded by the warm steamy areas; far, far below the hot belt of the equatorial

regions. It was the area covered by the mysterious Seven Cities, whose kings are said to be immortal as well as nameless—and it is a part of Venus which prefers to isolate itself behind a curtain of non-communication.

Ceulna, as I described the map to her, became excited by the possibilities of the thing. Her eyes, with that bright sparkle of danger, of the love of peril, fixed mine in a question. I nodded, for who could resist Ceulna in anything?

She turned our little flyer in a great curve above the vast cloud-sea, winged at a steadily increasing acceleration toward the equator. The sun was hot here; unshaded by the cloud layer, the sweat poured off me. I opened the air shields a hair, let in the freezing stratosphere air.

Beneath that shining sea of soft-breasted cloud-mass lay, I knew, vast unknown seas, and great island continents covered by primeval untouched jungles. And we had neglected to give anyone our course in case of trouble!

At last we dipped down through the cloud layer, down and out into the cool diffused light of southern Venus. On the horizon I marked the tall truncated cone which the map had given as our first landmark.

Circling this extinct volcano slowly, we looked for other landmarks to help us locate the treasure which Hecate had bequeathed me. It never occurred to Ceulna's lovely self nor to my own credulous mind that the dying Hecate had left me a thing that would prove a revenge upon me for all her "wrongs." To Hecate I was a traitor—that she had left me a booby trap should have been evident.

To this day I do not believe that she *did* leave me that micro-map for any purpose but as a reward—that at the last she meant well by me. But the map led us into more real peril and mental anguish, more horrifying experience . . . I had an inkling that it would do so; and that there was danger in these unknown portions of Venus I knew from the sparkle in Ceulna's eyes. But somehow I think that at the last Hecate was her best self—wise and well-meaning, since it cost her nothing so to be. She could not help it if Ceulna and I walked into the place like two babes.

We landed the flier in the vast, oddly shaped valley, surrounded by perpendicular cliffs of pure basalt. The tree growth,

which everywhere on Venus assumes unbelievable proportions, had here outdone itself both in size and in florid departure from the earth-norm of plant growth.

The valley was the vast crater of the ancient volcano which had once long ago made an inferno of a quarter of this globe. That time had been tens of thousands of years, by the looks of the trees that grew at the foot of the perpendicular cliffs that were the walls of the crater.

In the center of the valley were many little lakes, and streams could be glimpsed occasionally connecting them. But nearly all details were obscured by the titanic trees. Some of them were a hundred feet in girth. Species I had not known existed anywhere, reared their trunks up and out of our ken in the mists that capped the great cliffs.

This was a place apparently touched neither by the hand of man nor the hand of time. Everything was new and bright, hung with soft brilliants of moisture or dew, the leaves scintillated as though each were a jeweler's rare design. Flowers hung in great festoons from the trees, red and blue and gorgeous hues without names known to me. Birds flashed their long-tailed flight curiously close to Ceulna's lovely, avid face—avid for more of this rare and enchanted spot we had chanced upon by one means of Hecate's map.

CEULNA and I saw nothing of human or animal kind to be afraid of among the mighty primeval trees. We locked the ship. Ceulna was armed with a powerful antique ray pistol, myself was unarmed, and it somehow did not occur to me that peril could exist in the peaceful, park-like valley.

Area can fool you from the air, and what had seemed a diminutive, toylike valley in which animal life must of necessity be confined to small creatures or goats able to climb the terrific cliffs surrounding the valley, became, as we walked, a titanic place of vast extent! I should have realized that in a location so sealed off from all contact with the world outside by those cliffs, life might have evolved into different and even more dangerous forms, but Ceulna and I were in a vacuous state of happiness in which rational thought and care for natural precautions does not occur.

Like Adam and Eve we walked into the primeval paradise, laughing and talking

carelessly and happily, following a tiny drawing on the map which indicated that a stone temple would be found directly beneath a certain projection on the cliff's side. The projection, shaped like the great head of a lion, was directly overhead, and we were walking around a small hillock which concealed the place where we were heading. As we rounded the smooth grassy hips of the hill, cries came from ahead in a strange language, cries which meant fear and desperation! Unthinking, I leaped ahead of Ceulna around the hillock to get a better view of whatever was happening—and stood for a moment looking down on the strangest scene ever to strike the eyes of an Earthman.

A green amphibious man from the marshes of the shorelands stood at bay, surrounded by a score of frightful figures. His long sword leaped and glittered in furious arcs as he fought off his too numerous attackers.

The green men are a species peculiar to Venus, produced by the conditions there from some common ancestor of man. Their feet are wide and webbed, their skin is partially scaled, partly smooth, but otherwise their physique resembles an Earthman's, except that ages of swimming and wading in the shallow marshy seas of the shorelands has made their swimming muscles powerful and their feet wide for support on the muck. They have no noses to speak of, but breathe through openings in the neck, which are both gills and connect with lungs in their chest. Their eyes are very wide and nearly immobile, and their head is topped by a spiny crest like the mermen's.

His clothes were a few glittering baubles, for the hot, wet air of Venus makes clothing superfluous—all Venusians exude continually a fine moist secretion more copious than sweat. So does an Earthman sweat continually and copiously—or he does not live long. After a time, due to conditions I do not understand, the heat becomes quite bearable—it did to me. There are northern men in the tropics of Earth who do not mind the heat greatly.

I stood watching the magnificent battle this splendidly-muscled savage was making, somewhat in the attitude of a man watching a play on the stage. Abruptly several of the creatures started toward myself, and I realized with a sensation unpleasant in the

extreme that I was unarmed against the worst creatures on Venus. They must be the worst! Behind me I heard Ceuina scream at the sight of them. Short piercing shrieks full of the ultimate sensation of horror.

Ceuina had a weapon. I had none. Beside the tall green amphibian lay four corpses, his fellows killed by the horrible beasts that ringed him. Action resolved the horror that was freezing me, plunged me forward between the great black onrushing bodies, crashed my shoulder against one of them so that I caromed off the weight like a man off a spring board, and onto the dead body of a mighty Venusian marshman.

Stooping in my stride, I plucked a great sword from the dead half-man's hand, and spinning on my toes, I placed my back to the great scaly back of the Venusian, swung the sword in an arc of glittering movement. The black, smooth body flowed back easily from the swing of my blade, but the point drew a long line of blood from the side.

THE face was a great red mass, something like the rear end of a mandril, and about as attractive. The shoulders were vast and smooth and round, hairless and horrible, but packed with great rolling muscles and a capable flowing power that bespoke coordination equal to a cat's. The barrel of the body was neither ape-like nor man-like, hairless, smooth and wide as a barn door. There was a reptilian repellance, an alien life in it, and no description fits the boneless flowing roundness of these creatures. Snakelike, either composed of endless vertebrate joints or held erect by some means that did not need bones and skeleton, the body flowed down and out in six great tentacular legs that ended in wide, soft pads of flesh, bristled and furred like the feet of a fly.

They were no creature I had ever heard about on Venus. Back to back, myself and the stranger whose ally I had inadvertently become, wove our weapons in a steady flashing pattern of death, lunging desperately, steadily, to let the life from one of the ring of horror-spawned bodies surrounding us. I panted:

"All right, now, how do we get out of this?"

The man replied in a slurred, alien tongue that yet resembled the language of

Lefern's Amazons enough for me to understand.

"We fight to the death—or we retreat slowly to some place these creatures cannot follow. Where is such a place?"

I sank my sword into the place where a neck ought to be, nearly sprained my wrist tugging it loose before his falling body tore it from my grasp, recovered just in time to thrust the huge weapon to the hilt in the boneless center of a charging horror. The red, horribly patterned face opened its vast gash of a mouth showing a row of fangs that extended back far enough to belong to an alligator, and screamed like a steam whistle with the cord tied down.

In the silence that followed the death scream of the creature, I yelled:

"Ceuina, pick off a few of these with your ray! Get in the ship! Bring it overhead, blast em! Do something!"

The silence closed down, there was only the sinister sliding rustle of the great hairy pads of feet, only my own panting breath in my ears, only the swift thud of the feet of the Venusian amphibian behind me as he danced forward and aside to thrust again at the practically indestructible belly of a hairless monster. But no clear reassuring cry from Ceuina, no throb of motors from our craft, no darting ray picking off the terrible red impossible faces snarling beastrage at our defense of our lives. No Ceuina!

I threw a look at the side of the mound round which we had walked so carefree, with our laughter preceding us—and where she had been there was only the glitter of her fallen ray-pistol on the soft feathery grass. No Ceuina, and wherever she was, she had dropped her only weapon!

I boiled with rage, and the slow tide of bereavement began to rise with its terrible weakening despair within my breast. Rage, despair, sorrow and a realization of the desperate need to see what had happened to my love and to do something about it before it was too late—and there was nothing I could do but swing my point-heavy sword at one of the impossible beasts and curse as he slid his body out of the arc of the blade with a cat's ease—and with less effort, for his six legs gave him a sphere of movement of great size without moving a limb.

With this maddening play of emotions

within me, and no time to sink to the grass and indulge the despair that had so suddenly become my dominant thought, I swung and hacked at the huge beasts and strove to keep from thinking. I took chances, knowing that it would be easier for me to die now than to live on without her. But the green man spoke again:

"If we work slowly backward together, toward the ancient temple, we can hold them off in the doorway one at a time, while the other rests. They can come at us only singly between those massive stones. At nightfall, if we should live so long, they will give up and go to their nests."

"I am not much interested; but for your sake, now that I have fought this long, I will continue. Lead on, and I will keep at your back."

The stranger leaped a good ten feet away at my words, I darted after him, we fought thus for some seconds and again he leaped toward the beasts, driving them back with great swings of his sword, from which they retreated roaring. Thus by spurts we traveled across the feathery grass, under the vast, smooth-boled trees, drooping their impossible racemes of bloom above our heads, while the tiny scarlet humming birds buzzed unnoticed.

THAT the park-like peace of the great green-floored forest should contain these monstrous parodies of life that had attacked me was too incongruous. I felt like a man struggling in a dream.

Within a hundred yards, as we turned about each other driving back the threatening fangs, I saw the refuge for which we headed, an ancient pile of crumbling, massive stones above a great, dark doorway. The doorway was carved out of one great hewn stone, and was six feet at least in thickness. Standing within the doorway, it was true, one man could protect himself from the creatures while the other rested.

So night found us, alternately and wearily holding off this abysmal creation of the forests of Venus and sinking into weary moments of half-oblivion. With the coming of darkness the great soft-footed creatures gave weird cries, and lumbered off into the gathering shadows.

Still no Ceulna raised the glittering spear of our craft above the trees' misty tops or shot her searchlight seeking for me. I did not care about anything else. My mind



DONAR

insisted that what I knew must be true could *not* be true. She must have been seized by one of them from behind and borne off even as she lifted her ray pistol to help me in my fight.

As the need for exertion went with the beasts into the night, I sank in exhaustion beside my strange ally. Exhaustion and dark despair such as I had never felt closed about me. For so long, in my servitude to the revolting Hecate in the despicable role I had been powerless to escape, somewhere in my mind the vision of Ceulna had remained, giving meaning to life. Gradually her image had become a kind of guiding star, a hope of regeneration, a thing that had become interwoven into every tiny thread of the fabric of my being. Suddenly to lose her to such a thing as had overtaken us in this weird forest, under these beetling unscalable cliffs, was to lose all reason for living. I sank to the rotten stone floor of the ancient temple beside the sprawling figure of the battle-weary gilled man, and a blackness welled within me. I hardly

listened as he began to speak.

"Friend, you have risked your life to save mine. If ever I can repay you, I will find a way, my brother!"

I grunted, but was not even interested. Finally I said:

"In saving you I have lost the light of my life, Ceulna, my affianced, was with me when I plunged forward to your rescue. Now she is gone! Can you repay me such a loss?"

It was a bitter and cruel thing to say, but the blackness within me gave me no other thought to put into words. He sprang to his feet.

"You mean that to save me you lost your bride to those beasts! I cannot believe it!"

"It was not my fault. I assure you the whole action was inadvertent. She was well armed, but I saw her weapon lying upon the grass and herself gone. I do not care what happens now. The hope of her is all that has kept me alive, and now she has gone. I have no reason to want to live now."

This death desire was not unfamiliar to me, is familiar only to those who have lost one they love. It kept me from saying anything but that, over and over.

"I do not care. I cannot want to live . . ."

The Venusian lapsed into silence, did not speak again. He understood that speech would only add to my pain. Presently he tugged at my shoulder, and I rose and followed him into the blackness of the temple, his hand on my arm the only reason I moved. My mind had sunk into a protective darkness.

After a short walk, he bent, lifted something, made me follow him down a flight of stairs. The air was damp and cool and the passage we followed wound in a spiral down and down.

"This is a thing never before revealed to an outlander. This passage leads beneath the City of Nicosthene."

"Nicosthene? It sounds familiar. What about it?"

"Nicosthene is the seat of the immortal kings of the seven cities. The other six kings rule under the overlordship of the King of Nicosthene. Alexan, Phys, Rhylat, Arsinoe, Delphon, Ekippe are all tributary to the divine Lord of Nicosthene. I will take you to him. If anyone can help you, he can."

"Why should he wish to help me?"

"Because you have saved me from death, and my life is important to him. I am a son of the king. He has many sons, but I am the seventh. As such I will inherit the rule of one of the seven cities upon his passage upward. He will be grateful . . ."

"YOU are a somebody here?" I laughed. It was a bitter sound. "Do you think anything he can give would help me?"

"I did not mean what you think. I mean only that he can give permission to search the sacred valley for your loved one. Without it we cannot even go back into the valley."

"What were you doing there, if it is not permitted you?"

"Once a year the seventh son of the seventh son must examine the temple and the valley to make sure that the ancient treasure is still safe from outlanders or marauders. Our party was attacked by the Ungi, which is what the beasts are called. They are sacred beasts, protected by our race because they in turn protect the shrine of the ancient treasure from thieves, from irreverent spies, and from those who would use the ancient secret for the pleasure and power it would bring."

"What is this ancient treasure, green one?"

"It were best you call me by name, stranger of the good heart. That is Donar Bonitore."

"My name is Jim. Big Jim Steel, from Pittsburgh, Pa., and other points. But why do you dodge the question about the treasure in the temple?"

"It is an ancient treasure of great value. Even in my gratitude to you I cannot bring myself to speak of it openly."

"I wonder if it is the thing we came to seek. Did you ever hear of the Limping Mother of Sin? Hecate, the Vampire."

"That I have, Jim Steel. She it was who told us of the value of the treasure and to guard it well."

"Curious mind, that. Evidently she wanted you to take care of it till she got ready to wrest it from you. Certainly she did not want it badly at the time, or she would not have left it here. She gave me the map that lead me to that temple, and told me there was a treasure there worth any other a million times over. What can it be?"

"She sent you to your death, Jim Steel."

No man has ever escaped from that valley." "Hecate did, evidently."

"Hecate came here in force, long, long ago. She set a fleet down in the valley, burst open the temple, looked at its treasures, left after bidding us guard it well."

"Or so you have been told. Is it possible that at that time she put some of her own men in secret charge of your government, and went away to allay the fears of the people?"

"That is impossible. My own father rules Nicosthene!"

"Is there no power greater than your father?"

"There is only the oracle, which he obeys upon all important questions."

". . . and what is the oracle?"

"The oracle is a strange thing. It is a mist that grows upon an altar whenever one asks the idol of Krampat a question. Usually the mist speaks, sometimes it only grows dark with anger, then one knows something is wrong and asks another question."

"Sounds phony to me."

"I do not understand, 'phony'."

"Never mind. Some day you will."

We had walked now for nearly an hour. The way had been rising for some time. At last Donar paused, felt with his hand upon the smooth stone wall of the passage, pressed an intricate sequence, and a door swung open. He stepped through, and I followed. We were in a similar passage. Donar walked down this passage, nodding gravely to two green men we passed, and walked through an arching doorway of carved stone. I followed.

WE STOOD before a tremendous edifice of stone. I stood gawking upward and around like any country boy upon his first journey to the city. Nicosthene was awe-inspiring! These scaly savages of the marsh-lands must have had a terrific past on this planet. When the city was built, I had no way of knowing. Some of the vast piles showed many signs of age, others, smaller in size, seemed of newly erected material.

Their architecture was weird and alien to my eyes. I had never seen a city of the marsh-men before, though Ceuila had described them to me; my mind, little used to the nuances of the Tuon Amazon's tongue, had not absorbed her descriptions perfect-

ly. They built in tiers of quarried rock; each stone must have weighed several tons. Each tier stood back from the lower by several feet, providing a walkway around the building at each floor. The shape was often octagonal, tower-like, then again was square and rugged, the tiers low-roofed. Again, some individualist among their architects had selected a more complicated and irregular shape for the base, a circle at each end of a square, or a diamond placed upon a circle for the second floor, and an octagonal level after that. The whole assumed an appearance like no other city I had ever seen, not unpleasing, as each walkway at each level was gardened and the feathery fronds of the lovely Venusian ferns lined each path while over and among the ferns blossomed the brilliant orchidaceous floral riot that is a Venusian flower garden. Along these walks strolled the people, ungarmented except for their harness and the brilliant baubles blown of glass which they hung upon the harness, or the sprays of colored feathers they wore over their crests, clipped to the spines. It made a scene extremely impressive, and I understood the pride upon Donar's face as he stood watching me gaze upon his city.

"One day you will rule here, Donar?"

He nodded, but with a sudden sadness at my words that I did not understand. Somehow I gathered that the life of a ruler here was a burden and not a pleasant thing.

I had hung the long sword of the fallen green man in my own leather harness, where it dangled, naked and bloody, beside my long legs. I must have made an incongruous sight among the scaled and crested natives of Nicosthene as we walked sedately down the broad, flowered avenues toward a vast tiered palace rising in the center of the city. It was the only building upon a circular plan entirely, and the only building in which the walks wound in a spiral up the sides. A true tower after the Babel pattern, it was unique and tremendous among the other buildings.

Suddenly I started back with an exclamation of horror. Shuffling toward us was a tall green man, aged and hideous with the grey scales of some disease. But what had horrified and startled me was the realization that he wore the long concealing cloak of scarlet and gold that had marked the followers of Hecate in the conquered cities, now freed by the war of the Tuons against

her hideous rule.

"What does this mean, Donar?"

"That is the revered person of a priest of the oracle! Why should you look so taken aback. There is nothing to fear."

"That's what you think, brother! I know better. Turn aside, I do not wish that one to see me with you."

CHAPTER II

I sing myself. I am man. One thing, man, and no other. Only man-tree, kin-tree, gen-tree. I am man-thought, me.

Elder Writings

WE TURNED aside as I wished, but even as we passed from sight of the approaching red-robed figure, a little voice laughed within my mind and said:

"Big Steel, we know you. The dying Hecate did not give you a gift, she sent you to me for her revenge. Do you remember me?"

The telepathic ray-voice was extremely familiar, and my mind swung back through the years of unbelievable experiences that had been mine since first I met Ceulna upon the streets of my home city. Far off on Earth—in that gloomy city of steel-making and work and saloons and the night sky filled with the glare of the furnaces, on that dismal street of little houses all alike—that voice had come to me from *Nonur*, the evil witch who had been Ceulna's boss before she stowed away on the ship that bore me to Venus. I had last seen her with Hecate, fighting the Venusian Tuon space navy . . . and had never heard of her again. She had been reported slain that night.

"So you are here?" I was too experienced in thought-exchange to betray too many of my real feelings. That mask I had learned so well to pull over my thoughts began immediately its creation of false thought and a pleasant reaction rose falsely within me. Carefully my mind recounted how nicely her gown had fitted her the first night I had met her, under the crucified form of a dying girl on a stone cross.

She seemed fooled by my automatic acting, for when she knew me I had been incapable of such mental trickery. Flattered, her mental voice betrayed that she too had an emotion of pleasure at sight of me.

"It is too bad that I have to kill you, Jim. But these people are quite as innocent of knowledge of us as Earth's millions. I cannot have you talking."

"What makes you so sure I will talk?" You know what I came here for!"

"Yes, I know what you came for, and that Hecate gave it to you. But the treasure has long been in my hands. And what a treasure it is. I would enjoy showing it to you before you die. To let you know what you are missing."

"Well, why don't you?"

"I may. I'll see you later. After I get through killing Ceulna. She is here with me."

"Ceulna!" I called aloud, a gladness and a desperation ringing in my voice, for I knew that the mech-ray would carry my voice to her if she were near Nonur in the ray-room. I heard her call faintly.

"Jim!"

"Nonur, if you harm her I will kill you with my bare hands."

"I saved her life, but not for you. I have a use for her. I need a force of men."

I remembered that when I met Ceulna she had been recruiting for Nonur, men were unable to resist her appeal. Under mental ray-control, against her will—a seductress to death!

Where had been in my heart a dull resignation, now flooded a tide of hopeful resolve. I would get even with that black witch, Nonur, would . . . But how?

DESPAIRINGLY I contemplated Donar. He did not suspect his city was really under the domination of the antique rays, in the hands of some remnant of Hecate's power—was as ignorant and unbelieving, probably, as Earth's credulous humans.

"Does your oracle ever speak to you with a hidden voice?"

Donar looked at me oddly.

"How could you know that?"

"Just guessing. I have heard of such oracles before. Is it a good oracle?"

"It seems to know everything that goes on. One is very much afraid of its knowledge."

"And your father obeys it implicitly?"

"He must or he would die. But it seems evil, sometimes."

"I can imagine!" I was beginning to get things into focus here.

"Did you ever hear of the Elder race and the Elder caverns?"

"I have heard of such things, but talk of them is forbidden. They are secrets belonging to the priests of the oracle. They are secrets kept by such priests since our world was young. I know nothing of the caverns; they are forbidden."

". . . and how long have these priests of the oracle worn red robes with golden embroidery after an Earth pattern?"

"That is not so long. Only since the time of the mighty Hecate's visit to us. I do not know why, but the wearers of the scarlet robes have become the greatest of our priests since that time. It is all very mysterious, one is afraid even to speak of these things."

I did not answer. It was all too clear to me. But why had Hecate given me the map to the temple if it was already in the hands of her men? Somehow, in spite of all her evil, I could not believe that she meant me ill when she gave the map to me. It could even be that she thought I would go there in force with the Tuons and bring disaster upon Nonur. I would sooner think that, for there was little love lost between them.

"I wish I knew for sure if Ceulna were in Nonur's hands, or if it is a bit of their everlasting mimicking of living people after they are dead."

"What do you mean?" Donar looked at me amazed. I remembered suddenly that he did not even know of Nonur's dominant position here as head of the caverns under Nicosthene. There was no more use trying to tell him than to try to tell an Earthman that there were Elder caverns under the basalt of Earth's crust. So I passed it off . . .

"I was musing of something in the past. Think nothing of it . . ."

We now approached the great tower of the spiral stairs and began to mount the endless flight. A steady stream of dignitaries passed us by and an occasional red robe as well. These wrinkled and deadly customers gave me a sinister and amazed once-over, but none of them spoke. I could well imagine there was a great deal of secret confab going on about me. Certainly some of them must have known me quite as well as had Nonur. And hated me much more.

The muscular, tall green men padded by

on their wide-webbed feet, favoring us with many curious glances, but seemed on the whole an exceptionally polite and well-behaved people. The furore the advent of a man as strange to them as myself should have aroused in other cities was not present. But there was a buzz of comment after our passage that told us we were not unnoticed.

The ray voice came again in my mind, saying:

"You will never leave here alive to bring the Tuons and the Sea People down upon us. You will not betray us as you did Hecate!"

The words did not trouble me so much as my own thoughts. I asked: "Is Ceulna with you as Nonur said?"

"Ceulna is dead! Ha, haaaa . . ." The voice went off into maniacal, but sinister laughter. I knew then it was one of the ray hands whom the de-infection of the aged mech had driven insane, and that nothing he said could be relied upon. Yet I knew it was more likely that she had been killed by the monstrous creatures in the crater valley than that she had fallen into Nonur's hands. It could well be true that Nonur was lying. Her kind would rather tell a lie than the truth as a matter of principle. "The truth can be used against you; a lie is never of aid to an enemy." Besides all men are enemies of such as Nonur, and only used by ray-control or other force. But what could she want of me? In my case I saw that she intended to use Ceulna as a means of controlling me, so had said she lived and was in her hands. But if she were? I writhed at the thought. She were better off dead.

I passed off the puzzle with a shrug, for there is no knowing what may be in such peculiar heads as Nonur's, for they do not think in any normal pattern.

WE ENTERED a great chamber on the third level, and passed up an aisle in a church-like silence of rustling and peering eyes and softened breathing. At the end of the aisle on a raised platform sat an elderly green man, his scaled skin old and rough, his crest pale and drooping. He bent to peer at us through large square spectacles, which he adjusted with his webbed hands. About him stood many of the brawny, near-naked marsh-men, nobles by the gaudy trappings and great jewels

that flashed in their harness, and by the pride in their high-held heads. I looked back at them as curiously as they looked at me but my hands are horny with toil, and my soul is seared with degrading experiences so that I feel little of that emotion called pride. The old man spoke to Donar:

"My son, where are your comrades of the sacred inspection of the relics of antiquity? Where is your guard of honor? And who is this stranger with the bloody and careless sword hung at his side? Naked steel in this room is a dishonor!"

"O sire, disaster overtook our expedition to the shrine of the valley. We could not do our duty, too many of the Ungu set upon us. We should have waited for darkness, but pride in our ability and strength proved our undoing. My comrades were slain. As the fight with the beasts continued, I should have been killed myself had not this man leaped from nowhere and seized a sword from a dead hand to aid me. I can never repay him, for I owe him my life."

The old man looked at me curiously.

"What were you doing in the sacred valley, stranger?"

"I came because of a map given me by a dying friend." I did not tell him that the 'friend' was Hecate, the undying vampire who had plagued the planet for so many centuries.

"The map was a map to the sacred ancient shrine in the valley of the Ungi." Donar said, looking at his father oddly.

The old man pondered. "How your friend came by such a map is a curious matter. We have little traffic with the northern hemisphere. Your trappings are of the Tuon pattern. I did not know the Amazons allowed their males the freedom of such expeditions."

There was a faint sneer on the old man's face as he said this, and I colored angrily. The males of the Amazons' cities are always held in contempt on Venus among peoples whose males are dominant. I could not take his innuendo.

"I am no Tuon, though I was near married to one when this happened to me. It is a favor I would like to ask of your reverence in return for the life of your son. My affianced is lost in that valley. Even as I sprang to aid your son, she must have been seized by the Ungi. I would request

aid to hunt for her if she yet lives."

"No man can live in that valley alone and certainly no woman."

"She is no ordinary woman. She is of Tuon blood, and an important personage in Lefern."

"If we could help you we would, but it is a useless task you set us. No one can stay alive in that valley. These headstrong youths plunged into the valley in their pride, but it is a thing no one but the foolhardy would do in broad daylight. It is little safer after dark, when the Ungi bed down in their lairs. For then the great cats come out to prowl. There is no hope for her, but I will send trained hunters to look for her. That is all I can do. I wish we might do more."

I bowed my head, and following Donar's example, backed away from the "presence". He was a quite ordinary old man, after all, and not too difficult. I glanced at Donar. As a seventh son, he was supposed to be a somebody, but no one was paying him much attention. It was not a very impressive court.

DONAR conducted me to a sleeping room, bade me goodbye for a few hours. We were to rise at midnight and accompany the hunters to the valley to search for signs of Ceulna.

I dropped upon the broad sleeping platform, covered with skins and silken robes. I had hardly closed my eyes when I felt a rough hand shake me awake. I tried to put up a hand to help myself erect, only to find that both my hands and my legs were bound.

". . . and keep your mouth shut, too, or you get a club over the head. On second thought, I'd better gag you. These marshmen have big muscles."

The voice was one not unknown to me, but I could not immediately place her. Then I remembered . . . Enora, Hecate's aide on Venus. I looked at her despairingly as she adjusted a gag roughly in my mouth. Her huge, square, unlovely figure bulked large beside me. I remembered the terrible strength that the ancient beneficials had built within her through the centuries she had served Hecate. Evidently she had been sent here to Nicosthene to organize the seven cities for Hecate's purpose at the time Hecate was defeated and pursued through space to her eventual capture on

Earth. Evidently the Sea People and the Tuon Intelligence had overlooked these branches of Hecate's organization in their purging of all things that had felt the evil influence of the Blood-Users. Enora read my thoughts, laughing grimly.

"Yes, Big Steel, there is no Hecate to protect you here. And we of the *Old Order* are not taking any chances with you. You are going to the caverns which are forbidden to these fools, the marsh-men, and there you will die as quickly as I have pumped your head of all that may be of value to us."

I groaned. Strong hands raised me to shoulders, I was borne off into the darkened passage, and then through a wall panel that clicked behind me, and down. Every step downward deepened the despair that had again become myself. What was the use? Hecate was dead, but the evil wisdom of the vampire methods of immortality she had evolved lived on in her followers. Would Venus and Earth ever be free of them? Would centuries pass and hecatombs of children be drained of their blood before men flung them off forever?

If they were running this city in secret as they did many another city on earth, before the Sea People wiped them out, just who was going to intervene in my behalf? I knew I had no chance. As soon as Enora got through pumping my info on Tuon activities out of me, I was through living. That gave me about two days to live, at the longest.

We were going rather slowly down long flights of steps, built between the walls of the tower of the ruler, when a noise of racing steps behind me made the blood surge through me in a flood of hope. A cry rang through the darkness.

"Steel, Jim Steel!"

The light of torches rushed nearer above us on the stairs.

Enora yelled, in the backward idiom of ray-talk.

"Flap your feet, or taste steel, you rascals," and in the light of the approaching torches I saw that my bearers were the huge duck-footed men of the hot belt of Venus. The most formidable of the races of Venus physically, they are yet dull of mind, with small eyes and flat heads. Their feet are tremendous; the spreading web-feet of the green men mere lily pads by comparison. Evidently Enora had imported them

for the hard labor of her secret clique under Nicosthene. However, fine feet they were for walking on the mud of the hot swamps of their home land, they were not the thing for sprinting down stairs and along stone passages. The pursuing men of Donar rushed rapidly closer and closer, at last Enora, now far ahead of us on flight, decided that the safest thing for herself, who was no speedster, being built more on the lines of a ray-tank, was to abandon myself until a more opportune time. She called to the huge obedient blacks to drop me, which they did literally, depositing me in a heap on my head. As they made off, their huge feet flopped on the floor like wet cement sacks.

DONAR rushed up, severing the ropes about my wrists and ankles with a most carelessly slicing blade. I pulled myself erect painfully, but in the slight pause Enora had evidently entered another secret passage of which Donar was not as cognizant as he had been of the one on the upper floors of the tower. I cursed volubly.

"We have got to find her. We'll never get another chance like this one to kill her."

A ray voice in my mind said: "I'll say you won't. Nor would you have had this chance if a watcher had not fallen asleep."

Hearing that, I knew that further pursuit of Enora was worse than useless, since the ray could fire upon us if it wished. We went back to the doorway through which we had entered the passage, and there Donar bade me meet his friends the hunters.²

² The keeping of the ancient secret enjoins certain procedures. For instance a man cannot be killed with a penetrative ray very frequently or the use and the nature of the weapon would become apparent to all, rather than a "mystery."

That is why Enora had to kidnap, or use a knife upon Steel, because to use the ray would give away their presence to the surface dwellers of Nicosthene.

The same problems are constantly before the ray-people of Earth caverns. Endless dodges and subterfuges have become habitual through time-worn usage: when they want a man killed, a surface assassin is employed, since the death by ray would expose the penetrative ray weapon. When they want a man to do something, they use unnoticed mental control and suggestion, as out-and-out contact with his mind in open telepathic communication would expose the nature of their power and equipment. Similarly, the trickery

(Continued on next page)

He also questioned me about what had occurred.

"It is unthinkable that this should have happened to a guest of the Rulers. I cannot imagine who did it! Or why?"

"It was the people behind your blessed oracle, you innocent dupe! Your father is not the ruler, the oracle is boss! They sent an agent to kill me before I told you. But they made the mistake of not finding out that you were coming at the same hour to wake me for the hunt in the Valley of the Ungi."

"What you say is sacrilege! It cannot be. The oracle is as old as my people. How could it be *people*? It is an invisible God!"

"Why have all Gods been invisible, Donar? You don't know, but I will tell you! Because they do not exist! They are always mummery carried out to dupe people into paying something for nothing. The ancient racket that was your religion has been taken over recently by a new bunch of racketeers. How could you be expected to know it?"

"What you say is incredible to me, I would rather you did not say it. You are insulting my most sacred beliefs. It is a *sacred* thing, the oracle. You must not mention it again, or it will be my duty to get angry. And that would be small payment for saving my life."

"You said yourself that it did not always seem good, what it bade your father do. Why then do you object when I tell you it was the people behind your oracle who just tried to make way with me?"

"I do not know, my friend. It only pains me to carry on this conversation. Let us discontinue it."

"I would, except for the fact that the delusion you entertain about the oracle will be the cause of my death. If you did not believe as you do, it would not be necessary for them to kill me, for so many people would know about it that one more would not matter. Promise me one thing, Donar!"

"Anything I can do for you I will do. It is my duty!"

which keeps the secret for them is intricate, habitual, and endlessly involved in taboos. "Knowing," for endless centuries, has been equivalent to a death sentence for a surface man.

This is why Steel knew it was useless to pursue Enora, for the ray would kill him, but would not unless it must to save her.—Author.

"All right. Promise me that if I am killed by these people, that you will send a man to the Tuon city of Lefern telling them of my death and who I think did it. That I think it is the followers of Hecate hiding here behind an ancient religious front. If the first messenger is killed, send another and another until you are successful, or are killed yourself."

"I will do as you ask, though you are wrong."

"When the Tuons come seeking me, promise me that you will see that they are told of whom I think killed me."

"They would not dare such an attempt twice."

"That's what you think, brother. They will dare, and soon."

If I had only known how soon, I would have sat down on the floor to take thought on how to summon some of the power of my adopted people, the Tuons, and their allies the Sea People. But I put it off till after the hunt for Ceulna in the valley of the monstrous trees and the hideous and likewise monstrous Ungi beasts.

THREE were twenty of the tall green marsh-men. These were a different stamp than the city dwellers of his race I had seen heretofore. They were men of the swamps and forests that the Ruler had summoned to aid me in finding my affianced. They were hunters used to combat with the wild life of the Venusian jungles, so much more dense and riotous than the worst jungles of Earth. On their faces was a grim knowledge won by hard trails in their everyday pursuit of the furs and the meat that form so large a part of the trade in Venusian cities. They were lean and hard and scarred, and they wore their weapons with an air no city folk ever achieved. On their backs hung the wicked Venusian crossbow and a quiver of the short explosive bolts that were the ammunition for the crossbow. At their sides from their plain, unjeweled leather harness hung heavy curve-bladed swords, a different weapon than the straight long-sword worn by the soldiery of Nicosthene. In addition they carried a wicked bladed short-handled stabbing spear, the head as long as an arm and wide as a shovel. They looked efficient and smart, and their grim, capable appearance gave me a better hope for success. If by some chance Ceulna lived in that ter-

rific primeval forest that was the crater of the mountain upon the outer side of which Nicosthene had been built, these were men who could find her.

Donar led us at a dog-trot back along the tunnel by which we had come so short a time ago, and we emerged from the ancient stone gate of the crumbling sacred temple. Night lay among the mighty trees whose sight always gives one a feeling of impotence, of puny insufficiency, of an awe of the awful growth power that erects these vast spires toward heaven. Up and up they towered, vast columns of darkness into the night, breathing and rustling their own knowledge of our presence. Softly the feet of the hunters went on ahead of us out into that night, under those trees that are so much more than trees, trees which many classes and tribes of Venusian men still worship as did the Druids of old, and as the blacks of Africa still worship. One can feel that they are right, for there is a majesty in such an assemblage of life form, standing forever side by side and surviving the endless centuries while man perishes and scrambles and passes on beneath their branches.

Donar and I brought up the rear now, for we were in truth but excess baggage. These men knew what to do. Several of them followed my and Donar's scent to the place of battle, where lay now stripped skeletons of the huge Ungi we had left bleeding corpses. Tracks of many kinds had packed the soil about the skeletons. Huge carnivores and scavengers of Venusian animal life had fought here over the meat.

The leaders of the hunters held on leash small, wiry "tidlars," a kind of dog-size animal that is half reptile, nearly blind, with a fluffy growth of feathers and a scaled tail and legs. These seem possessed of a superior sense of smell. They passed unerringly across the scene of death and on to the place on the grass where I had left Ceuña. Her pistol still glittered on the grass. The tidlars made a great fuss over it, for it had her scent—which they had been given from her scarf which I had tucked in my belt pouch. Then they went on, silent again. Their eerie hunting was strictly silent, except when excited, as by the find of the pistol, when they give vent to a slight cry something like a great catbird might emit. A meeowr, over and over,

and a leaping up and down and around like hounds about to be fed told us that they were at another find and I raced ahead to see what it might be. I found only a crater in the earth, and about it the fragments of metal and drive gear that told me our plane had been blown up.

Back along our trail the tidlars went, still straining madly at their leashes, and after them the hunters, some with their crossbows in their hands, bolt in the cradle, watching overhead and behind, their heads never still, but darting around on their supple necks in a way no Earthman could imitate.

The trail led back the way we had come for a space, then turned away toward the cliffs. Here the tidlars followed straight along the base of the mighty cliff for minutes, but suddenly turned in to the cliff and stopped, whining and sniffing and giving their weird meeowr over and over. The hunters stood waiting for us, evidently baffled. I ran forward.

"What does it mean? What have they found?"

The leader looked at me sadly.

"It means your woman has taken wings and we cannot follow a trail into the sky. Either they walked up the wall of the cliff, or flew away. Here the trail ends."

"Cast about, look. It cannot just end like that."

"It cannot, but it does. I think she must have been taken into another airship or borne up the cliff by the Ungi, or . . ."

I was looking at the side of the cliff where the little hunting animals were doing a mad dance against the rock in their eagerness to follow a trail that evidently went into the cliff, right into solid rock. Something clicked in my brain, and I said to Donar:

"She could have been carried into a hidden door in that cliff side. Let us look where the tidlars leap."

POKING and prying with their strong spear hafts, the hunters shortly uncovered the cracks around the place where the tidlars insisted the trail led. These jointings of the door had been hidden with cleverly twined vines and moss. To get the door open after we found it was another thing. We pried at it with the heavy stabbing spears, but presently, perhaps because we had accidentally touched some hidden

spring, it swung open of itself, pivoting ponderously outward and revealing a dark and forbidding opening. I plunged in first, but after me poured the hunters with the tidlars straining at their leashes. As the last of our party entered, the great door swung ponderously shut behind us and somewhere a soft and evil titter told me that the door had not been closed by us. No one but myself heard this evil laugh triumphing as we entered, it seemed, and I laid it to nerves.

The tidlars led us through a maze of cross-passages. Our torches revealed only that the doors and openings we passed were so numerous that we would never find our way out if anything happened to the little beasts who led us. Even as I realized that we were not even marking the trail as a good cavern explorer would, and opened my mouth to call a halt and discuss exactly what we were going to do about getting out . . . it happened!

One by one the torches of the hunters flickered, lowered, died into darkness. I stood with hand upraised, about to shout, and found myself standing in utter darkness. Astounded by the weirdness of the thing, I stood for a moment in awe, but the screams of the little animals began to rend the dark about our ears. Something was happening to them, and the darkness made it impossible to say what might be happening. Even as the torches had weirdly guttered out in our hands for no reason, so did the screams of the dying little hunting animals lower, rattle and die out in death. They had trailed their last quarry, I knew without hearing it from anyone's lips. I had a pretty good idea of what was happening, too, but I hated to face the knowledge in my mind.

Through the darkness now came that evil titter, but louder and louder, higher and higher in pitch, more and more mad in quality. Over the maddening unseen cachination of sound I called:

"Join hands, then whatever attacks us will have to overcome us all. Together we are safer than if we allow the darkness to separate us."

I tried to fill my voice with confidence, but I had little of it in truth. I was a man who had too often been overcome by the sort of power I knew must be alive in these ancient warrens under the cliffs of Nicosthene.

Even as I tried to bring the men together in a compact group so that we would not become separated, some great body plunged upon us in the dark, snarling and ripping the life out of a victim. The side of the unseen beast struck me, hurled me half a dozen steps to the side. As I stood, irresolute, listening to the sound of my marsh-men friends struggling with some destroying beast they could not even see. A sharp clang came from just before me, and as I put out my hands toward the sound, I felt a cold roundness, a familiar feel. Nothing but iron bars can feel like that in the dark. A grating had been dropped between myself and my marshmen. We were all in the hands of Nonur, I knew surely, now.

CHAPTER III

*Out of the night,
Blind in the light,
Came the maid of all heart's desire.
Unnamed, unspeaking, her.
White of her skin,
The dreams brushed in her hair,
Bright with stars, or fire.
"The Nameless Maid",
Old Venusian Ballad*

NONUR'S voice laughed in my brain. "Infrared, Mr. Steel. One can see quite well in the dark with it, and the penetray. These caverns will be your tomb."

"I'm not dead yet, Nonur." I grated. "No, but your manner of dying will be entertaining. There is no hurry, you can not escape me now."

"You sound like a melodrama. Why don't you brush up, be a modern demoniac. You're old-fashioned. But of course, a woman of your extreme age . . ." I chuckled. It always gave me pleasure to speak of age to these blood-sacks. It was to them a horrible thing with which they struggled continuously, using ever more and more transfusions. Some of them had in their arms little silver tubes into the veins, every night to which were hooked the tubes which removed their own blood as the young blood of a child was pumped in. But in spite of all their struggles, in spite of their refusal of all food but the blood of the young, age made itself felt, marked their faces and bodies until they became so

hideous that they hid from the sight of all men. Nonur was vain, and the gradual decay of her beauty was, I knew, her one and only concern. The centuries left their marks in other ways, too. They spoke as our grandmothers spoke, used idioms and ways of the past, and the incongruity of this old-fashioned behavior made them laughable in the eyes of a modern man. Laughable, if one could forget for a minute their hideous, evil nature. That vampirism was not only done on Venus, but was in truth a practiced, customary pursuit of secret cliques on Earth, the worst truth I ever unearthed and had to face. Such things are almost impossible for the mind to accept, even when they stare you in the face in the person of a vampire who had survived a dozen centuries, as had Hecate and some of her followers.

The base foul grossness of Nonur's degenerate being flamed now in a succession of curses which delighted me. It is not often one gets a chance to hurt the feelings of a monster as callous as her.

"You cannot escape age or the consequences of your foul and evil life. Nonur, why not give up and die now, before all the things that will happen to you at the hands of the Tuons come to pass. Ceuula and I gave them our destination when we left on this jaunt. They will be here for us, it is time now. We intended to stay but two days."

"If that were true, you would not tell me, Steel. You will die in my arena, struggling against the worst forms of life on this planet. And every time you kill one beast, you will be sorry, because it only means you face worse the next time. You will die many deaths before you die. I intend to help you win, so that at the end I can take your broken body and complete your torments in ways you know about. You know what you face, Steel. Try and die before I let you, that is all!"

I felt the soft sweep of her invisible ray, a sound like no other, like the sweep of a distant broom cutting air. Always the sweep of those rays through the air reminded me of the ancient witches riding their brooms—and they make a sound somewhat like a sweeping broom, or like a sword whistling through the air. I knew she was gone, that I was alone again.

As I stood there in the dark, more lonely perhaps than I have ever been before in my

life, I was sure there was no hope for anything for me, ever. The despair that had consumed me upon the first loss of Ceuula swept over me again, and I sank to the floor. Great sobs—mingled sorrow and rage shook me. I ground my teeth and beat the floor with my fists. A man does such things in the dark when there is no one to see.

A soft hand touched my bare arm, and a still softer voice said:

"Come, friend. Nonur is not watching. She has fallen asleep. Do not ask questions. Come, quickly, with me."

I knew there was nothing to be gained by refusing, and perhaps everything to gain by doing as the voice asked. I rose, followed the soft touch on my arm. The creature seemed to have eyes suited to the dark. She, or he, or it moved with a swiftness my feet stumbled to match.

Doors slid aside before us, metal gratings lifted clinking in their slots as we passed. She knew her labyrinth, and moved through the dark as a blind man through his home. Presently a faint glow began to grow ahead in the round boring we traveled. As soon as it grew stronger I paused to look at my companion. A faint whistle escaped me as I took in the tall, slender whiteness of her, the delicate features, the floating hair, the infinitely sensitive being clothed with flesh that floated on slim bare feet beside me. Her eyes turned toward me at the sound, but the eyes were pale and strangely blank. For a long moment I did not understand, and then a strange pathos, a feeling that one feels when a small puppy is run over, or a kitten falls from a roof, ran over me. She was blind!

HER slender body was clothed in one long, flowing garment of pure white; a thin, glistening fabric. I knew it was of the Elder weave, for no modern mortal ever achieved the fine delicacy with modern coarse threads that the Elder race put into such intimate garments. Through the fabric her maiden's body glowed and moved with an utter sureness, a confidence in itself such as only the noblest of the race of men ever achieve. She was all spirit and grace and the slender, delicate, utter essence of beauty, and she was . . . blind!

My voice sounded to me like a profaning of life's best and most sacred as I said:

"Who and what are you? I do not

understand!"

The strength and masculine coarse tones of my voice just did not harmonize in my mind with her in any way—I was the beast walking beside beauty and trying to be nonchalant. My big, hairy arm upon which her hand rested as snow rests on block rocks, was somehow filled with a coarser kind of life than vibrated in her body.

"Long ago, before Hecate came and placed her minions over us, we ruled the caverns under the Seven Cities of the South. My mother was the oracle of Nicosthene, and tradition had made the Oracle the prime mover of all things in the Seven Cities of the marsh-men. We are not their kind of people. We held aloof from the great, strong, scaled green men, and when Hecate came, there were not enough of us to hold her off. We died, or were enslaved. You know of Hecate?"

"Yes, little angel, I know much too much of Hecate. Thank God she is dead."

"We kept the caverns and the ancient sciences secret from the marsh-men, which was an evil, but we tried to make it up by keeping their life clean of trouble, by giving them safety and good government through the oracles which their Kings obey. In some ways it was good. But now they are all in the hands of the Limping Hag's men, have been since I was a child."

"Where does all that leave myself? And yourself? What are you meaning to do now with me?"

"We have gradually worked up a little resistance to the evil rule of Nonur, whom the Hag left in charge here. I am taking you to our own forces, the people of the secret caverns, to show you what might have been, to ask you to help us, and to save you from the cursed vampire. I heard her curse and revile you—that is how I knew you were not evil!"

"That is the best way of knowing, little spirit-of-light-in-the-darkness. W h a t is your name. I cannot call you angel all the time, or should I? Certainly it fits."

"Our people do not have names. It is a custom we do not happen to have developed. When you think of me, I will hear you. We do not even speak, except to the marsh-men, and to strangers like you."

I looked at her, wondering if she were not lying. Her delicate cheek flushed a deep crimson as I mentally called her a

liar. She said:

"We do not have the custom of lying, either. But you are a stranger with much to learn. I forgive you."

A people as naturally telepathic as that would not need names or lies. They would know each other without names, and they would not be able to lie for the lie would be read in their minds. Perhaps she was telling me the truth.

"Our race has been blind for ages. Nature has made other senses take the place of sight with us.

I thought she was taking me to a place of safety, and I guess she meant to, well enough, though where that could be if Nonur was ray-boss here I could not figure. The whole set-up was strange to me, and as a file of the great-bodied black duck-footed men swung suddenly into the corridor ahead of us, bearing down on us from side opening or passage—the girl put her hand to her mouth in sudden fear and hesitation. One of the blacks, about to pass us by unnoticed, suddenly turned to his fellow, asking:

"Is this not the one whom Enora had us bear into the passage, and whom we had to leave behind?"

HIS comrade stopped, peered into my face, then turned to the girl beside me.

"What does this mean? This man is meant to die, should be in chains! How come you to be with him?"

"Enora's plans have been changed. He is my prisoner. I take him to the place of the Master for examination."

"Your master is not our master. This man belongs to Enora, and she is our master."

I could not understand the politics of the discussion, but I knew very well I preferred the little girl as a jailer to the large-bodied Enora and her blacks or the evil Nonur. The blacks, about a dozen in number, had bunched up in a group, stood dully behind their leader who had stopped to interrogate the blind girl. I whipped out the long sword with which Donar had equipped me, and let him have it in the side. The huge blade sank into his flesh even deeper than I intended, for I am no swordsman. As I tugged at the blade, stuck in the tough black sinews, I screeched at the girl:

"Run, I'll be right behind you."

The other huge-thewed blacks, dull witted and slow, but terrible in the strength that is in them, were tugging at their own swords, were spreading out to surround me. I freed the blade, leaped to one side to draw them into movement that would leave me room for flight. One great black arm swung a sword at my head, I parried it clumsily, used the sweep of the parry to carry the blade into the muscles of his arm. He dropped the sword, tugged at a dagger in his belt with the other hand. I shoved him into his mate, sped past and legged it after the vague white form that had obeyed my command to flee. Fast as I could run, she was faster, drew steadily away from me.

"Angel . . ." I shouted. "Don't leave me. I don't know what to do next."

Behind me pounded the flopping wide feet of the blacks, a horror sound in the half-dark of this passage, lit by a faint glowing tube that ran its length along the top of the round ceiling. Ahead flitted the graceful form of my strange blind little friend; on and on went the chase. Gradually we left the heavy-footed, flat-headed black men of the southlands behind. The little blind delicacy ahead stopped by an opening in the passage, waited till I came up beside her. Her face was accusing as she stood there, not looking at me with those pale blank eyes, but sensing me with her mind. I could almost hear her thought.

"Great coarse creature, must you kill? Is there never any other way?"

"I cannot help it if I cannot see another way to deal with those who would kill me."

She sniffed, and said in her still, little voice like far-off whispering:

"You did not say you could speak with your mind, or hear the mind. It would have made things easier if you had told me."

"I never read a mind without telaug apparatus before. I do not understand why I should now. It must be the excitement."

"I see. Come, we go down here."

She stopped and pressed a stone set in the solid rock of the floor as if to fill some hole left by removal of a cable or pipe. A great slab of the floor pivoted slowly, and we went down a flight of steps, the stone swinging back behind us.

"They will not know where we went. They do not know the caverns, are really strangers imported here by Enora because they are tractable, and easily deluded into

serving for nothing. They receive no pay, but certain of the cavern mech is used to entertain them. You know . . . ?"

"I know how such things are done. Yes, I was a slave of Hecate's for years, and, too, I have worked for the Tuon intelligence. Can't you read me?"

"I have not had time. Sometime I will. It will be necessary, if you have been of the order that served the dead Hecate."

"I am quite willing, little white spirit. Now, lead on. I want to know where I stand, and get out of here. I must seek my bride, Ceulna!"

THE girl's face fell. Being blind, she did not know, perhaps, that her emotions were readable by her facial expression.

"So you have a mate?"

"I had, two days ago when I landed in the valley of the Sacred Temple. Now, I do not know if she is in the hands of Nonur, or if the Ungi have long cleaned her bones."

"But you want to know. Perhaps you shall. It depends on the master."

"Just who and what is the master?"

"When Hecate conquered these caverns, our rulers had certain technical methods that Hecate wanted for her own. They could not be learned easily—and she did not have time to study, being in the midst of her war with the Tuons. So she set up a kind of duplicate government. Our rulers kept their homes and their lives and their people; but the master-weapons and the real power she gave to her own, such as Nonur and Enora, whom you know—though those two have come here more recently. We of the old race serve our old masters. It is our right, guaranteed by Hecate in return for certain teachings. She never returned to complete her plans here, and the set-up of dual government she left has grown steadily more and more shaky and explosive. That is why there are two masters and two governments. We may be able to protect you against these enemies of yours, but you will be expected to do something in return. What that may be I do not know—though you probably do."

"I should imagine they want an alliance with the Tuons, mean to send me to arrange it."

"That could be. Now, be ready, we approach the Presence!"

I should have guessed by the appearance

and strange superior qualities of the blind, nameless girl that what I was about to see was nothing to which my mind was accustomed. She led me into a room such as I had never even dreamed existed anywhere on any planet. The strangest thing about the room was that it was alive! The walls were the color of flesh, a soft pink, seeming to pulse and glow with weird, lovely life of their own, and the floor gave to the feet as though one were walking on prone bodies. I could not even imagine what this effect meant, though the girl whispered a strange word to me, it meant nothing. She said "Dunder!" which only added to my wonder, and told me nothing at all.

About the room stood or reclined nearly a hundred people, and the qualities which had so struck me in the girl were here repeated a hundred times over and in some of them, much stranger qualities were evident.

I could feel their minds reaching for me, a sensation much the same as a hundred eyes turning upon me, yet vastly different. One is more embarrassed by mental nudity than at any other kind, and here I stood before these telepaths with my mind naked and revealed by their combined mental sight. As my face flushed red a slight titter ran like muffled, brittle glass breaking all around the chamber, though no lips moved, and not a head turned toward me. The girl beside me stamped her foot, and I could sense her furious mind berating their want of courtesy.

There was a luxury and a decadence in that weirdly lovely chamber. Those bodies were so soft and delicate, these faces too pale, these hands too unused to labor and creation. Yet a vital glow of something very like physical health, much augmented, permeated the atmosphere; so that inadvertently one looked for athletics, for huge powerful bodies sweating—but these things were not there, and not the cause of the sensation. It was the walls, the weird flesh-like substance coating everything in the chamber, that gave off this vital aura I sensed.

Upon a low-raised platform at the end of the room a youth about the age of the girl beside me reclined. His face was soft and undeveloped as the girl's, his eyes as pale and unnatural and yet beautiful. There was little of the male about him, yet a strange strength was in his face. I could sense his mind turning toward me, search-

ing me, and I tried to read his, but caught only a vague dreamlike view of a mind engaged in a study of the past and engaged in an insoluble problem, something like looking into the mind of a chess student.

HE RAISED a hand, and the girl and I walked toward him. We stood there, and I knew the girl was talking volubly, yet no sound was uttered by any one. All listened in rapt attention, then the youth spoke.

"Stranger with a name called Steel, we need you. You have come to a people who need you greatly."

"You can not need me more than I need you! In two days I have lost my young and lovely bride, and been near death a half-dozen times. My luck cannot continue."

"If it is luck, it cannot. But if I had your brawn, Steel, I would not call such things luck. You must be a bit hard to kill."

"That may be. But if I know Nonur—and I think I know her better than perhaps you do—whatever you are going to do with me or for me had better be done. She will not let any silly rules or conventions or political considerations stand between her and her desires. If she wants me, she will come here and get me."

"She may come, but she will not get you. We are not powerless here, and we have a use for you."

"You want me to get Tuon strength here to reinforce your own. But that is the very reason Nonur and Enora wish to kill me, because I will lead their enemies to them. What makes you think you can keep them from killing me? If you want such help, all you have to do is send for it yourself. They are very anxious to wipe out all remnants of the Limping Mother's ancient power!"

"Before the coming of Hecate, we feared and hated all the savage races of the northern half of the globe. We wanted to search your mind to find out about these people who fight Hecate. Hecate was not a person easily killed. If we ask the Tuons here, their power might be so great that we would find we had got ourself into an alliance that would devour us."

"I understand. But if I were you, and knew what you must know about such spawn of evil as Nonur and Enora and the

others of Hecate's band, I would not hesitate. Nothing could be worse, and most certainly not the noble Amazons. Their ethics and their intentions are the finest I have found on two worlds."

Just where this conversation would have led, I do not know, but what I feared would happen, did. A great projection of Nonur spun madly into solidity in the center of the weird chamber of flesh-like walls, and standing in the sphere of force beams, Nonur, with a face of hard anger, gritted at me:

"You think to escape me, you thing of Hecate's! You will not."

I grinned at her.

"You should not get so angry. When you screw your face up, all the wrinkles show."

She winced at the mention of wrinkles, a fine net of which were slowly becoming ineffaceable upon her pink-soft flesh. But she knew I only taunted her because it might be my last chance to hurt her before she went to work on me as I had seen others worked over in the past. She turned to the reclining youth who, I had gathered, was the "Master," whatever that meant.

"Give me this man, Master of the Nameless. He has been one of us for many years, and he has betrayed us to our enemies. He must die."

All of which was true enough, yet how false words can sound when the truth is very much more.

"I sent my messenger to get this man, Nonur of the Earth-People, because this man knows many things I want to learn. I will give him to you when I finish with him, if I think he deserves death."

"You will give him to me now, O little man who *thinks* he rules, or I will teach you now and forever that I am not Hecate, who could cozen you for the sake of a few words of wisdom. I will not dicker with you. Give me this man, or I turn loose my spayderines³ upon you! I am not talking to hear myself! It is time you learned who is master here!"

CHAPTER IV

"The lips that taste not water or love, or food, Hell's hotter Heart . . . is Nonur, Queen of Evil . . ."

*From "Hell's Queen"
by Tular of Lefern*

I HAD no idea these delicate people could resist the power of this pirate band, even were they numerous. The pirates were redoubtable and able warriors with the antique ray weapons—there were none better on Earth or Venus—and I knew Nonur would not risk a hair of her head. She was sure of herself. Whatever condition had made this slender youth and these delicate blind people think they were masters in these caverns, I knew it could not be true. I did not want to be the one to bring to head a brawl that I was sure would cast the lives of most of them. I looked for a moment at the delicate vibrant beauty of the blind girl beside me, who must hold in her head many secrets of the Elder race much more valuable than my own life, and I could not bring myself to let my inaction cause a battle in which she would most certainly be killed, for I knew the tactics of such ray-fighters as Nonur. They kill the best-loved first "because it takes the heart out of them." In ray-battles one knows the minds of everyone the rays touch, and the many watch-rays hook all the minds up in one great, sensitive, pain-wrecked mind. Such cruel fighters as Nonur then pick out the persons who all the heard minds fear will be hurt and proceed to kill them first—by reading the general mind betrayed by the many watch-rays of the telaugs. I turned to the solidograph projection of Nonur.

"Never mind, Nonur, you can have your way. Rather than argue about it, I will give myself up. These people know nothing of me, why bring them into it. I only followed the girl through the tunnels . . ."

The reclining youth waved a hand at Nonur.

"Reading his mind, I see he desires death anyway. In which case, if you promise me

³ This is an ancient word of the caverns, and once was the name of an organization which periodically swept over the earth, killing all who in any way opposed the ruler of the caverns. Originally, in the Elder tongue, it was a word for a kind of police force who examined the people regularly for "der" and killed those whose errant minds were too dangerously destructive. Just as a secret police can be—like the German SS corps, and similar murderous tools of tyrants—a completely evil force, so had the word spayderine come to mean everything evil. It is used even today to describe cruel bands of murderous ray-men who travel through the caverns, killing everything that blocks their path.—Author.

his death will be painless, I give him to you. Who am I to argue with a man's own heart. He wants to die!"

"We will also talk about the Dunder formula at our next meeting. That question has dragged on long enough."

Nonur was mollified, and indeed these mad cavern creatures such as Nonur are unpredictable. At one time they are demons bent on complete destruction of all life, at another time they will allow almost any affront to pass unchallenged.

The youth said to her:

"The Dunder formula is ours. If I give that to you, it will then be another of our ancient sacred secrets you will request, and then another, and in the end we will die. I cannot understand how to make a binding bargain with what I have to offer."

"You mean you do not trust me?"

Nonur's voice was comically incredulous.

The youth looked at her a long time, trying to search her mind, but a beam such as she was speaking over conducts thought only when polarized by an adjustment to induct the thought of the subject. Nonur had not made this adjustment. Her mind was blank.

"I do not wish to insult you, Nonur, but I don't trust you fully, in truth."

I laughed out loud, I could not help it. To one who knew such as her intimately, it was a ridiculous conversation. She could not have been trusted with a dime if a child's life depended on it.

The youth looked at me with his blind eyes, reading me as I laughed. His face darkened. He sighed in perplexity.

"Give her nothing you can avoid," I said. "When she has obtained everything that she can she will turn and rend you. She is wholly a viper, a mad destructive mind of the worst type. Do not believe her in anything."

"Yet you are giving her your life?"

ONLY to avoid the loss of yours, and your charming sisters." I had deduced their relationship by their resemblance. "I do not think you have the ability or the weapons to battle these people, or I would be quite willing to allow you to fight for my life. I think your life is allowed to continue in order to get information from your daily life that could be obtained in no other way. You should remember that Hecate began her career by

stealing secrets from a hidden group of wise men. The habit is inbuilt in her organization. You are but a dupe of the Earth-pirates. Why do you not know it?"

"If what you say is true, it were better we died fighting, than to go on feeding this monstrous thing with our wisdom. It is hard-won knowledge from many centuries of the past lives of our wise men. They must not do this!"

"Yes, and those centuries your forefathers were studying and dying, these were living on the blood of innocents, battening fatter on vampire food, and looting and destroying the future of the whole Earth with their mad lusts. Do you know that on Earth my people have been deprived of the knowledge of the Elder caverns, too?"

"I did not know that!"

"It seems there are many things you do not know. If you want allies, why don't you ask the green men above to aid you. Donar is a fine Prince, his father is an honorable man—why do you deprive them of the knowledge of the caverns?"

"It is an *ancient custom* to do so!"

"You are afraid of what they would think if they learned of your age-old pleasures, you mean. Do you know how despicable such an attitude is in truth?"

"It is despicable, isn't it?"

"Extremely so. You think you are better than the green men above on the surface, but the reverse is true! You are a pale, blind, decadent race, and the green men could save you but your pride will not allow them to do so. That is very silly!"

The whole lazily reclining group were now on their feet, the delicate pallor of their skin diffused with the red blood of anger. They looked much more alive that way.

"It is not the way of the Gods!"

"What Gods? Yourselves?"

"The Gods of the machines. They would object!"

"That has the earmarks of a superstition to me. Whatever you mean, it is not true!"

We had all forgotten Nonur and her ultimatum and my promise in the heat of our discussion. Just what we would have decided or done I never learned, for a file of Enora's black, monstrous warriors plodded in on their great, flapping feet and seized my arms. One pulled my sword from its scabbard before I realized what

was happening. There was no sign of resistance from the pale, delicate people of the "nameless" race, though the girl who had brought me gave a cry of sorrow and of indignation as I was led away like a sheep to the slaughter. Just what they might have done given time and thought upon the matter I do not know. I believe they were a kind of pet people of Hecate's, who milked them of wisdom, and nothing they did showed me different. That age-old knowledge of the machines and the thought of the Elder race can be worth endless pains to such infinite rascals as Hecate and her spawn of the caverns.

THE file of warriors, me in the center, passed now through a section of the caverns inhabited and bustling with life. Slaves piled bales of merchandise in great rooms, frozen meat hung in long rows in refrigerated chambers—meat that looked, some of it, very human. I did not know if these blacks ate human flesh, but it was quite probable they were learning the taste for it from their leaders. The demoniac background, the history of the ancestors of such as Nonur which I had gathered here and there in conversations with cavern people, always included the tradition of cannibalism, a tradition still alive and a part of their life. Nonur herself, upon our first contact long ago in the caverns under the U. S. city of B...., had shown me that she was the product of a school of thought, a way of life wholly evil, which had made of her an automaton of evil deeds. Her use of the organ of opposites, of pain and pleasure, could only have been the product of an age of evil teaching, for, like music, such virtuosity does not grow overnight. That *evil* did have such an age-old background, such a host of forebears, such an infinite history and intense cultivation of intricate and difficult arts, had been a revelation to me then. Now, being led by Enora's blacks toward the inner sanctum of what I saw was a large and functioning organization still, I thought of those evil arts of Nonur—and wondered if I was to be on the "other end of the wires," as the crucified girl had been that first night in the caverns.

Wondering again of Ceulna's fate, I could not help but feel glad that I would not have to go on without her. The sooner death came the better.

The blacks led me to a long series of barred cells, a jailer received me at a desk, threw open one of the cells. I was thrust in, the door locked. The heavy flopping feet plodded off, a horror-sound of dull obedience, of slavish lack of self-will—a sound much too reminding to me of the hordes of men on Earth plodding to work, work which supports the evil life of the caverns all unknown to most of them. The blacks had no real understanding of the horrible vampiric life their daily labor and courage was strengthening.

As I turned from the bars of the door to look about me I saw that the cell was not small, but contained a dozen men sitting or lying about in dejected attitudes. They glanced at me, half curious and half derisive, but said nothing. On Earth I would have been the target of a general interrogation, here it was not good form to ask a man questions unless needful. If I had something to say, I would say it, if not, let me keep my privacy.

The men were of three races, the tall, green amphibians, the dull, flat headed blacks, and three of the fierce redskins of the equatorial belt. These I looked at curiously, for I had not contacted any of the race before. I had heard much of their hot-headed nature, their extreme combativeness bordering on blood-lust, and of their mental quickness coupled with a muscular dexterity making them the most feared warriors of Venus. But my business on Venus had never led me close to any of them, though certain of their leaders had at times interviewed Hecate, I had never been present to hear what went on.

I asked one of them—in the jargon that is used over all Venus between different races—"Have you ever heard of the Mighty Hecate?"

ONE of them looked at me contemptuously.

"She is called 'The Mighty Hecate' only by the swine who serve her. To me she is the 'Limping Hag.' What about her?"

"I was thinking we might have something in common. We do! We both hate the Hag's men."

He grinned.

"And that is why we are here. But how could one help hating them? You know what they do with children?"

"I know, only too well."

"Can a man *like* that? No, he must fight it! If such things prosper in the near future, it means the end of all mankind everywhere. They will become the blood cows for a vile race of 'superior' beings, who will subject us to always greater degradation as their long life makes them better able to trample us underfoot."

"That is what I wanted to learn—if you men understand why you were here. Much can be done with understanding men."

"We are here to entertain the vampires by fighting and dying for their entertainment. That our death leaves the children of our race that much more unprotected is only incidental."

"I do not know much about this part of the world. Are the Hagnmen strong here?"

"Everywhere but in the sea. The Tuons considered their work done when they cleaned them out of their territories. But they were strong under the Seven Cities, and many fled here from the war with the Tuons and the Sea People. They hid behind the Blind Masters here, who are deluded, and do not know what fearful things they harbor. These caverns have always been secret from the surface, here in the Southern lands. The Sea People themselves do not know what is here. Respecting the Blind Masters, they leave the Hagnmen alone. It is sad, but what can we do?"

"We can escape, bring them down upon the hiding vampires!"

"We will be dead within days. Others do not know the truth."

"Yes, one learns the truth too late."

TIME dragged by leadenly. To amuse themselves, the agile red men began to practice with their slender, curved swords. I watched their unbelievably clever fencing with an envious eye. If only I could make a sword dance as could these red-skinned savages! Presently I said:

"I have no weapon but this heavy blade of the Marsh-men. I know nothing of the art of sword play. If you taught me something of the tricks you display so lavishly, I would be grateful."

The red one I had spoken to before laughed.

"Our skill is the product of a lifetime of training. You could not learn it in the short while you will live. Why bother?"

"For the fun of it. My huge blade is longer, let me see you disarm me."

Much of the strength given me by Hecate's integrative rays still remained with me. Coupled to my naturally huge wrists and hands this made me able to handle the big swords of the marsh-men easily. I whipped the yard-long steel from its scabbard, whistled it about the laughing red man's ears. He ducked in unfeigned fright, for nothing is so dangerous as a sharp sword in a tyro's hands.

"What you ask is a great deal, white stranger! While I know enough not to harm you with my blade, you might stupidly spit me like a fowl. I do not like to teach you with that great thing you carry. If you would use a length of wood . . . but there is none."

I looked about. There was nothing but the heavy poles of which the bunks were constructed. I looked the bunks over, selected the thinnest of the hardwood poles, put my great hands to it and pulled it loose from the heavy framework with one wrench. As I turned around with it in my hands, I found the company all on their feet, staring at me with awe. Unconsciously I had performed an unbelievable feat of strength!

"This job you have given me is still fraught with peril . . ." laughed the tall, sinuous red man, the plumes of his head nodding with his mirth. "You have the strength of an Ungi! One blow of that bludgeon would do as much damage as a sword, you great booby. However, let us see what you can do . . ."

He lunged lithely at me with the long curving blade, I parried the lunge with the club, and brought the blunt end around to lunge in return. He caught the bludgeon on his blade, but his strength was not equal to tossing it aside, and I inadvertently pushed it into his stomach. He groaned and leaped back, his face red with anger. His blade whistled, a lock of my hair leaped from my head. I backed from him, seeking to keep the wood between myself and the lightning play of steel he was tossing around me. Accidentally my bludgeon caught his edge, which stuck in the wood long enough for me to tug it from his grasp. He stood unarmed before me, chagrin mixed with laughter upon his again smiling face.

"You have little need of lessons, Big One. You have a natural ability which is nearly as good as skill. We will develop that, my friend. Heaven help your opponent in the arena."

The days went by swiftly, and we took turns in the mock battle that went on nearly continuously between one or the other. We all knew that soon our lives would depend upon our skill with a sword—and we did not waste our time, for there was nothing else to do with it. Swiftly I developed, soon was able to approximate the deadly skill of these red masters of warfare. I had heard of them before. I learned to respect and admire the red warriors of Venus in that cell. Swift to anger, they were as quick to forget, and they accepted me as a friend because I had avowed hatred of the Vampire Cult.

AT NIGHT, as I lay in my bunk, Nonur's ray would come mockingly to me, saying:

"You will soon lie bleeding upon the arena sands, and I will laugh!"

I would answer:

"You have said that many times before. Why do you not learn a new thing to say?"

"I will say a new thing to you when I show you what has become of Ceulna. Her fate you will learn before you die—and that will be rich entertainment. It is not a pleasant thing, what is happening to her."

I would answer:

"You lie, as ever, Nonur! You do not even know where she is. Besides, you will not outlive me long. The Tuons are preparing an army to invade your caverns even now. I have seen to that."

"You lie, too, Steele. What you say is not true. They do not even know we live."

"You will learn differently too late, Nonur. If you had good sense, you would be far away from here now."

"It is our last retreat, Steel. There is no more. Here we fight to the death."

"As you did in Harak? Methinks they surrendered there a little prematurely."

"What makes you think they can defeat us here so easily?"

"You have not near the strength you had then, and the Tuons are far stronger in numbers. Your existence depends upon a breath, a mere whisper would bring them down upon you. I have provided that whisper."

"You wish you had done so, you mean. The Tuons have not the faintest idea where you have gone. Nor shall they learn. As for their numbers, I have attended to that . . ." Nonur gave a hideous, tri-

umphant laugh. If I had known what she meant! "You should see them!"

The only thing that worried me about Nonur's attempt to cause me mental torment with calculated taunts was her constant reference to what she had done with Ceulna. I could not believe that anyone could have seized her from the terrible Ungi beasts, yet it might have occurred. If it were not true, what then had caused the ship to be blown up? It was possible that Ceulna had dropped her pistol at sight of the horrifying monsters with their six legs and terrible jaws, then ran back to the ship in uncontrollable fright. There she could have been seized by someone sent by Nonur to destroy the ship, for it could not be left there to draw attention from searchers, if any were sent after us. But I knew no one had any idea where we had gone, for no one but ourselves had seen the trinket Hecate had given me. Had she given me that to get even with me, or in a hope that I would bring revenge upon Nonur whom she hated even though they were allies? I would never know.

Another thing I could not understand was why these deadly swordsmen as well as myself had been given our weapons, once safely locked in our cells. This was explained to me, for our cells opened on corridors directly connected to the arenas. Those doors never opened except to take some of us to our deaths. There would be no opportunity to use our weapons except upon the wild beasts or savage men in the arena. Our food came to us through a slot under the door.

All day before the event we heard the workers overhead preparing the circus for the games, moving to and fro in their labors. Too, the cells were now jammed with prisoners, and the great wooden pens with bellowing animals and monsters from the steaming jungles. Nonur proved to have a lavish hand where the satiating of her lusts were concerned.

Myself had learned a few things from the Red Warriors, and was not too greatly worried. For I had learned that my great strength gave my heavy longsword a decided advantage over the ordinary arms of even such men as the Red Warriors, making up somewhat for my lack of skill. I could move the heavy weapon quite as quickly as the Red Warriors could their own lighter swords, and its extra length

made this advantage deadly. A long and strong-armed swordsman, I learned, does not need the skill and speed a lesser man needs. I knew, too, that against the green marsh-men, armed with a weapon similar to the one they had given me, they could not handle the heavy weapon even with two hands as rapidly as my own Earth muscles could. I had an advantage which made me feel equal to any human antagonist I might meet.

In those days of fencing practice, I learned to *like* my sword with an affection for a good tool. Looking at its weirdly chased length, speaking of the age of development of the race of the marsh-men, I wondered how many centuries Earthmen, as well as marsh-men, had been deluded by the cavern monopolists into ignorance of the vastly better weapons in the Elder caves. And how terribly the race of man had been held back in its progress toward a sane and warless future by that same monopoly. And tomorrow, I was to die fighting with that weapon for the entertainment of these same monopolists, on an alien planet, before these sadistic, degenerate wretches. My blood was to be spilled to give them one more thrill to add to the vastly intense and unbelievable thrills the use of the Elder mech furnished them so lavishly.

Well, I would make it short and sweet and as dull as possible for them. I had no wish to get them entertainment with my death, yet a man will cling to life, and fight for it even when the very struggle is giving his worst enemies a delightful period of vicarious adventure. I would fight!

THE day of the circus dawned. The great penetrays that brought in the sunlight flooded the bright yellow rays through all our cells. Bustling guards hastened on last-minute preparations for the coming spectacle.

During the morning the gladiators were led past our cell, fifty at a time, guarded by the grimly-held ray pistols of Nonur's guards. Some of the officers were renegade Tuon males, some were marsh-men, some red men, a few were halfbreeds of the black race. The lowest class guard was the duck-footed black, tremendous, stupid, obedient, and utterly without human qualities to the casual eye. Myself could see in their rolling eyeballs and nervous movements a con-

suming fear—evidently Nonur had put a disciplinary fear of some awful fate into them. If I had known what thing Nonur held over them I would have understood their implicit, slavish obedience better. I was to learn.

Past our cell the wrecks of the slaughter going on in the arena were dragged; mangled, still-moaning bodies, limbs torn off or chewed into fleshless fragments; bellies ripped with swords, heads crushed in or dangling on broken necks—dying or dead.

Nonur was putting on a royal show for her followers. Her blood-drinkers, her vampires were sating their consuming lusts with ferocious abandon. If only I had known that this was but preliminary to the great spectacle; if only I had realized that Nonur was a different article than Hecate, who had long tired of such infantile appetites as blood and torture and synthetic wars. Nonur—was different. Her tastes ran to the bizarre, the terrible, the shocking. The utter abasement of all life before her must be completely shown, must be demonstrated with hecatombs of potential rebels, with troops of warriors, with vast display of force in utter destruction of alien power. But what to her was familiar and friendly; what to her was a loyal follower; was to any other mind a demon from Hell.

Nonur was a product of a vastly different school of demonism than Hecate. What these differences were I had never fully realized.

Mid-afternoon the call came for our own cell section to take to the arena. We were herded out under the mouths of ray-pistols, armed only with our swords, aligned in military order, marched into the glaring light of the sunlit arena. Overhead balanced the mirror balls, hung on cables from the cavern roof, from which the sunlight, brought through rocks and clouds by conduct-penetratry, was reflected blindingly into a shadowless arena of white sand. The great bowl of the seat sections went up and up into the darkness; only the first rows of white faces were visible to us.

We marched in order toward the great throne-like structure upon which Nonur and her retinue of vampires clustered, reclining on pillows of levitation, floating inches off the stone, their bodies assuming any position which comfort dictated. Halted before the monstrous seat of this still existent

power of the immortal vampires, I stared up at the wrinkled, pink-grey faces of men and women I had known for what seemed a lifetime, when I had served as Hecate's errand-boy and plaything.

Nonur herself was the only one who had retained youthful appearance and beauty, others exhibited the abnormal growth of portions of their faces which had so disfigured Hecate. Behind the horrible old-young group of life, mostly alien to Venus, were grouped the favored slaves; nude females and males, decked with flowers and jewels, postured sensually, their faces masks of pleasure-wrecked character, sensual-lipped and sleepy-eyed, the playthings of these monsters. Their minds were in the same condition my own had been before the clever hands of the Tuon medical technicians had restored me to true life. As my eyes passed over these beautiful, debauched bodies, my heart dropped to my boots, for among them I saw with rage, with a vast horror—Ceulna! A changed Ceulna, who looked at me provocatively, her lovely face changed as by some horrible drug; her body, more beautiful than any other on all of Venus, wantonly displayed to all these amorous, debauched and lustful eyes!

NONUR, her odd light-emerald eyes watchful as a Pēle bird—the monster-hawk of Venus—peering at a prey in its claws, stirred in venomous triumph long awaited, as she saw my consternation at finding Ceulna alive and in the hands of her cruel and rapacious followers. Fierce rage boiled in me. I sought mentally for some way to strike back at her! Her voice came to me above the subdued roar of the crowd of off-duty warriors, of workers permitted this entertainment as a great favor, of rich marsh-men initiated into the mysteries at the price of their delusion of freedom—of heterae from the great sub-surface palaces she maintained under the Seven Cities.

"Big Steel, do you feel so big now? Your lovely Tuon dancer, do you love her new position in life? She has done well, has she not? May you be as successful in your new profession, my brave gladiator. Try and stay alive—just *try!* One day you may find revenge upon me. Ha-ha—that will be the day! I can read you, Steel, and your thought is very amusing."

"There is no use of speech with a fool

and a madwoman!" I cried back, spitting toward her face. "You can destroy, but you can not *win*. Soon the Tuons and Mer-people will sweep through your caverns, over your Seven Cities of delusion, and you will die more horribly than did Hecate! Think you to survive where she failed? Ha—I can laugh at you, too!"

She tried hard to preserve her triumphant tone as she signaled for the games to go on; but the fear I had aroused in her would not quite stay out of her voice. It trembled, nearly tremoloed. Her hand gestured to the warriors who ringed the great gates where the beasts would emerge upon us. They threw back the bars and raced to safety in their protected metal-barred pits along the walls.

Out into the glare of the arena shambled a horde of Ungi . . . but Nonur meant me to die, and behind them soon roared the great Auro, the vast-bodied equivalent of an Earth lion, though there is little resemblance. After this second wave of roaring, hunger-maddened beasts surged another wave—of flying reptiles, soaring out over the arena in hideous spirals, hovering, choosing a victim. I held the men together with my voice. I knew that only a united front could win us through, that to separate for greater freedom of action was fatal.

Side-by-side, myself and my red warrior-teacher waited, our blades quivering in our hands, our shoulders touching our comrades on either side. The great, black Ungi shuffled their many branching legs closer like awful animated fungi, their monstrous heads nodding right and left, confused by the conflicting sight of enemies fore-and-aft. The flying reptiles stooped, swooped upon their broad backs, were torn off and thrown to the ground hissing and flopping their membranous wings. Swooped, too, toward our compact band, waiting before Nonur's throne for the beasts to attack. Prowling back and forth, the Auro sniffed the sand, growled hungrily, licked at the bloodstains of previous combats. To top the menu, came a terrific screeching from the gates of the pens as a Genaulgl was loosed. It is a beast found only in the deepest fastnesses of the gigantic forests; a flesh-feeder. It leaps gigantically upon tremendous cat-like hind legs. Its striped hide is armored with small, but dense scales. Its mouth, steam-shovel like, is squarish, and armed with great dagger-like saw-set



Out into the glare of the arena stumbled the horde of the Ungi—

teeth. Its long, reptilian neck holds this fearsome weapon of its mouth thirty feet off the ground. Its great shoulders support two long, tentacular, boneless arms for grasping its prey, and it leaps like a kangaroo to get these weapons into play. It was the knight of the chess-board of nature's development toward primeval beastliness, and no fifty men with swords were going to be able to destroy it, the scores of Ungi and the dozen Auro, as well as the flying reptiles which were kept from the spectators by electrified nets.

A SCORE of bows had been allowed us, but the arrows given us were tipped only with small, stone heads, not war-arrows but small game arrows. Nevertheless, the Red Warriors knelt behind our front line, shot between us at the closing-in, shuffling line of Ungi; at the Auro, confusedly following the great black monsters, undecided whether to attack their formidable backs or the less formidable line of warriors. Behind these the mighty Genaulgl hopped closer, peering with its nightmare head over the squat necks of the Ungi, hissing with its

great cylindrical tongue straight out and quivering, reaching with its tentacular, single-taloned arms, confused by the light and the noise, yet warily sweeping its vast head on its unbelievable neck about and about, choosing the most delectable object in sight to stay its long delayed hunger, to sate at last the starving stomach so long denied in the pens beneath.

I could hear Nonur shrieking:

"Live, now, Jim Steel, live now!"

I resolved to do just that, but even my horror-tried eyes quailed at the vast bulk of the weirdly hopping, striped and poisonous looking Genaulgl, at the fiercely glittering eyes of the now quite close Ungi, making preliminary lunges with their terrible arms, to seize and pull us into a bone-crushing embrace. The great barrels of their bodies panted, the smooth flowing muscles under the black hide pulsed and reached, the hideous red excrescences on the wide-mouthed faces moved in grimaces of hunger and anger and bloodlust, the six bristled feet shuffled in that peculiar ground-covering walk that is like no other beast. Our blades flicked out, drew blood



followed by a wave of flying reptiles, soaring in hideous rage

in long gashes, our feet sought assurance of the earth beneath, reaching wide for strength. One of the Ungi fell from a hard and skillful thrust of my red comrade. To make sure, as the awful bulk rolled in reptilian shuddering at our feet, I sliced one hard-to-spare blow down at the short neck. The blood gouted out purple and stinking over our feet.

Together we kicked at it, trying to roll it out to the gaping hungry maws waiting for us, to give them something to appease the starving desire in them, but our combined strength could not move the dense weight of it. We circled slowly, swinging our blades, saving our strength, darting out whenever one of the Ungi gathered the six ugly pads of his bristled feet to charge. A trio of swords would seek for his vitals in a swift series of thrusts. Usually he retreated, screaming in pain, only to return, driven by an indomitable nature; the Ungi are known as beasts that never quit while life is with them but once they begin an attack, must be killed to escape.

Now two, now three of the terrible creatures rolled and screamed before our

swords. The swooping winged reptiles gathered at the scent of their blood, swooped upon the shuffling Ungi and ourselves, trying to get at the bodies between us. We withdrew a little closer to the wall, charged with electric wires to keep the contestants out of its loom and in sight. The reptiles swarmed over the bodies, writhing, squalling, flopping, tearing off chunks of bloody meat, diving ever at one of us or at the Ungi.

Our swords beat at these, shearing off wings and heads, taking their poisonous bites upon our arms, knowing that we were doomed. It did not matter if we died swollen with venom or torn by the Auro.

MEANWHILE the vast-bodied Gen-augl had hopped all the way around the arena, tried to get through the electrified net to the people, who shrank screaming from the awful head. Now he sniffed the air, rank with blood and sweat, hopped ever closer; suddenly landed among us, balancing on his tail like a kangaroo, grasping two of us with his long arms, while his vast neck arched over our heads, dwarfing us, shading

us from the glittering mirror-suns.

Our blades beat at his scaled sides, sank into his softer under-parts, twisting, thrusting, trying to extricate our comrades, but with great square jaws closed on their upper parts, he hopped thirty feet into the air, the two bodies dangling from his jaws like toys. He sat, thirty feet away, oblivious now to all but filling his maw, and in three great chomps had swallowed the first, began on the second. Sickened, I turned back to the reaching arms of the Ungi, only to see a leaping Auro sail over those arms, spread-eagled, directly above me, jaws wide. My sword leaped automatically to the chest, I fell backward with the terrible descending weight, my sword hilt desperately kept erect by holding it against the ground. The cat's weight struck the point. It screamed like a siren as the weapon bit through ribs and vitals, emerged from the back. Leaving the sword, I rolled away from the clawing, convulsive limbs, seized another blade from a corpse, leaped back to the kill. A thrust from above into the soft part of the side, a twist to find the heart, to let out the throbbing blood in one great gouting hole of escape. I tugged free the great blade given me by the Marsh-prince, returned to the side of my red brother at arms. He grinned a warm smile.

"Good work, whiteman from the sky. Better than I could do, by far. We may live yet another day."

"Not so long as that hopping horror of a Genaulgl lives on. He will kill us all before he dies."

For answer he pointed to an archer crouched behind us, aiming with exaggerated care at the monster still noisily chewing his meal of living flesh. The arrow sped, quivered in the side of the monster, the side toward the arena's bank of shadowy faces. I saw what the red hunter meant. For the great beast reared erect, pawed at the arrow, looked at the great bank of faces in anger.

That one subtly aimed arrow was all that was needed! The terrible monster reared up on those tall legs, crouched again, leaped fifty feet into the air, sailed like an avalanche, catapulted tons of bone and muscle directly at the thin barrier of power that was supposed to protect the people who were allowed to see Nonur's fun.

In a blaze of arcing, broken wires; in a shrill cacophony of screaming voices; of

scrambling limbs and white, panic-faces of suddenly-stricken pleasure seekers—in a sudden pandemonium augmented as the flying reptiles swooped through the great hole torn in the wires by the bulk of the leaping monster, the pleasure of these thrill seekers was suddenly transformed into a horror for which they were much less prepared than were ourselves.

After the flying reptiles the Auro leaped through the break in the barrier, and after these lumbered the slower, more terrible bulks of the Ungi. Grim smiles touched the faces of my comrades as we watched, standing somewhat awed at the sudden vengeance launched upon our captors.

Above us the group about Nonur broke up into hurrying figures, scuttling into the tunnel-like passages which led out of the bowl of seats.

Ourselves seemed ignored in the general flight, and not slow to realize our opportunity. We advanced, cautiously but rapidly, close together, but with eyes dancing for a way of escape, a way to turn this gift of chance to our profit. Into the corpse-strewn banks of benches our feet trampled silks and blood-dabbled garlands, and behind us our comrades leaped the wall under the still arcing breach in the wire.

We went down the first passage we came to, after the flying feet of the packed mob. We turned aside from the frightened, panic-stricken jam into smaller passages, hewing our way wherever a guard offered resistance. Wherever the people jammed a doorway we hacked our way through ruthlessly.

IN THE mad scramble of death we picked up several ray pistols from dead or dying warriors, and with these augmenting our scanty armament, raced down and down toward the pens from which we had emerged. Peering suddenly around corners, picking off still-pacing guards, racing along the dusty, ancient corridors of the labyrinthine caverns, we soon were unlocking doors, letting out the horde of arena-destined fighting men, arming them from the weapon rooms, turning back to the cavern city above us to see what a will and a weapon could do to our oppressors.

I knew we would not get far; so did my panting comrades, but all of us burned to kill just one of the wrinkled, old-young vampires before death claimed us.

I had a vague idea where to find Nonur

before she was ready for trouble. It was our only chance to make ourselves felt—to entrap her. We would try to use her as hostage or force her to help us escape by command. Such plans were in our heads as we mounted a huge elevator cage and ran it toward the level on which Nonur was supposed to hold court.

We poured from the elevator, thirty of us still able to wield sword, to aim a gun, but there were only ten short-arms to aim among us. Down the corridors we pounded pell-mell, our breath burning in our nostrils, our legs heavy, our eyes blurring with sweat, on into a great chamber where a strange, weird sight, an awful stench of corruption brought us to a halt.

Before us in a great crystal-clear vat of amber liquid coiled and stretched a monstrous life! What it was I will never know, but as we groped around the prisoning plastic, it spoke to us in a voice of such awful penetration, of such fear-inspiring, Satanic assurance, of such blood-chilling intensity of venomous intent, as to freeze us all in the immobility of despair.

"Children of puny man, my servant Nonur, the beautiful immortal has led you to me, that you might feast your eyes on my delightful forms, upon my lovely loins and gaping mouths. If you are wise, you will return to your pens beneath the arena, there to await a more natural death from the battle with the beasts of Venus than from my own alien appetite. For when I eat, I absorb, slowly; cell by cell my body takes in yours. You do not die, but live on in a constant immortal agony of subservience to my being. See . . ."

As one moving a muscle, the terrible creature rolled its translucent interior of half glimpsed convolutions of glass-like flesh, and a woman's face peered out at us, a face contorted in an agony unbearable—a face no longer a self, but only a dread despair enslaved by a mastering will. That face and some suggestion of her form remained upon the unrolling tissues, like a face painted upon a curtain shade, looking at us and remembering all of its past with an awful clarity. The eyes stared and wept, and one knew from those eyes and the half-heard thought still motile behind them that their owner would live within that beast for all her life, be its mind and memory as fully and completely as one's own memory and mind. That form of life I

do not want to think about; it was a thing that consumed mind and muscle and spirit and made them a part of itself without destroying one, but only incorporating one into itself as a slave into a slave-state. I gagged at the venomous hideosity of this fate. I retched at realizing that this once-lovely woman had lived the life of this alien and awful worm for unknown stretches of time.

What *was* it? Had Nonur found it here and used it, making it more horrible than herself? It had called Nonur "servant"! Perhaps this creature *was* the real Nonur, and she but a puppet it used, and had so used since unguessed periods of the past—a puppet it used to entice men into its power and its eerie and awful maw that did not kill, but did worse.

I TURNED away from the awful creature, sick to the marrow, only to see a line of guards emerging from the curtained and arched doorways that ran clear across the back of the great chamber where the crystal plastic tank enclosed the hideous creature. It had wisdom, had that beast from some alien time and space, from the awful past of Earth or other planet it had survived, and now I understood why the person of Nonur was able to rule these immortal, dead-alive, but time-enwisdomed vampires, understood *what* Nonur was! She was the arms, the feet, the robot of this monster! *This was Hecate's successor!*

The entering guards had strung across half the wall, long ray-rifles trained upon us. At their command we dropped our weapons. The tall red warrior beside me flung one despairing suicidal bolt of dis at the crystal home of the alien monster, only to drop beside me with a shattered arm.

I bent, raised him from the floor, turned to retrace my steps to the pens below. There was no use in fighting. My spirit, my mind, my self was confused and lost in the immensity of this revelation of evil. What chance had mere mortal man against such age-old beasts of time's abyss?

Despair went with me, step by step, and I sank into my bunk in the cell thankfully, hoping for the oblivion of sleep. Beneath me on the lower bunk panted and groaned the form of my red comrade, wounded to the death. I could do nothing for him. I knew they would kill him if he did not die before they got around to him, for I could

see that he would never use that strong right arm to wield a sword again. A dis-bolt does not leave a man's arm whole; moreover it leaves an infected wound. The radioactive poisons of dis cause the flesh to rot, and the wounds are deadly unless treated by expert hands. Such treatment he would not get.

But, during the sleep period, I was roused by lights approaching outside in the rock-hewn corridor.

Standing there, when I rose to see, was one of the hated gold-and-scarlet robes of the blood-drinkers, as they are called. Truth is, they do not drink it, but have it pumped into them direct from the child. This was a high one, of the inner circle of the Hagmen. I knew those symbols on his breast too well.

Beside the hooded, sinister figure stood three others. One was a strange guard with plain leather harness and heavy broadsword, a ray-pistol of a heavy type, and a great bunch of keys. The other two figures, one very tall and one slight and graceful, I took to be a couple, a man and a woman. Both were shrouded in grey robes, their faces concealed by veils.

One of the guards stepped in to my bunk, shook me by the shoulder as he flashed an

³ No one was more astounded than myself to learn that the ancient superstition of the vampire that lived on human blood was not a myth or folk-tale, but a genuine monster who had once been human. Medical science, pursued to its logical conclusions in modern treatises on transfusions, plus the nature of glands in the young and their function in causing growth and renewal of tissue backs up the physical possibility of the vampires' real existence and longevity. That the vampire has been a possibility since the world came to know age was a discovery for me. That all these countless tales of vampires had a basis in actual scientific truth, was a revelation. Why assume that they did not exist, if they could exist, and it could be proven that they could exist and prolong life indefinitely by utilizing the blood of children? If modern monsters in human form do not utilize this means of retarding age is chance, and not by any means because of its impossibility. We assume these vampires of young blood do not exist! But when we know that such a blood donor would live on for years, that some blood donors have given hundreds of transfusions in modern hospitals in legitimate selling of their blood to save human lives, one wonders. Were the old tales true? Are they just as true today?

How do we know they are not? We assume it!—Big Steel.

antique lanthorn into my eyes. I got up groggily, he hustled me out by the shoulder before I could pick up my sword or anything else. I was clad only in a loincloth of rather scanty dimensions.

The gold and scarlet figure spoke in that husky, aged-yet-young voice I had learned to distinguish as belonging only to those who lived on blood transfusions.

"We would have speech with you before you die, Steel. Come!"

I followed them down the corridor. The guards locked the door again and returned to their posts. I knew it was against the rules for a prisoner to be removed from one of those cells after he had once entered them except to be taken to the arena. But one did not expect Nonur to worry much about any rules, even her own.

I kept glancing at the face under the scarlet hood, trying to make it out. I knew most of the inner-circle members from their conferences with Hecate at various times, and my curiosity consumed me. Who could it be and what could they want of me in the middle of the night?

We walked thus for a long time, the muscles of my legs told me.

We entered a chamber, and a door with the heavy lines of a safe door clanged behind us. The scarlet-robed man turned a great wheel, locking the door shut. I knew it was one of the metal rooms all Elder forts are equipped with, impervious to all rays. Then the man threw back the scarlet hood from his head, and I gasped!

CHAPTER V

*Beneath thy shield
strong do they seem,
by thee bestirred
they strive in the fight;
The Valkyrie
Wagner*

THAT head—lean, ascetic, ultra-American, modern in every line, yet instinct with a wisdom, a knowledge of evil and its ways—I remembered well. I knew that suave, deadly slimness, and the rod he now brought from under his cloak, a long, slender rod wrapped about with silver spirals of wire. We had stood side by side behind Hecate on her last voyage when disaster struck.

"You did not expect me, did you, Steel?"

You were not the only one to live through that blast. The Tuons took me into their service. I am doing this as a part of what I owe them. Understand? I am a friend!"

"So the Tuon Amazons know of this place? You give me hope!"

"That's just it, they don't! I fell in with Nonur after they released me to trace down others of Hecate's company, and have not had a chance to contact them since. So, you can do us both a service."

"Go on. I am quite ready to believe anything of you. You never looked like a man to accept Hecate's life-methods."

"No, I am not that depraved, in truth. But there is something even more important, which you must take care of for me. Do you remember Hecate's last words to you?"

"She gave me a map, telling me that a mighty and valuable machine lay there awaiting discovery. But when we landed, Ceulna and I thought she was killed, and I escaped by a chance meeting with a marshman, Donar."

"Well, that conversation was recorded, but the record was not read until you had left. Then it was too late, and they meant to get the details of the map from you after your honeymoon was over. But you never returned to Lefern. Now, here, I have learned that there *is* a mighty secret, and that she was telling the *truth* when she gave it to you. But she did not even know it was dangerous for you to come here. Or she forgot, she was nearly dead. I have the formulae and descriptions of the machine, the plans by which it may be assembled from parts stored in the ancient warehouses, as well as the chemicals which are mixed and put into it. I want you to take these to Lefern and bring help—all that can be raised. This thing is the answer to what we all seek, a defeat for age. No baby-blood business from the black past, but a real answer, a synthetic flesh as well as a magnetic device for repolarization of the aging flesh. It is a thing long to explain, but here are the plans. I cannot leave, but I can help you escape."

"I will help you to escape if for no other reason than to spite that monster's heritance. Hecate left a past that even I must do everything to combat. Yes, Big Jim, aiding you, is aiding myself."

"Nothing would please me more, if only I could rescue Ceulna. As it is, I don't care



BIG JIM STEEL

much."

"Ceulna lives. I rescued her myself from the forest, blew up the ship. It is necessary for me to act as if I still were wholly one of them. I know it is not pleasant for you, but she will not be harmed so long as I live. But you can understand that where Nonur is concerned, anything can happen."

"And left me to die? I don't quite trust you there! You rescue the most beautiful of the Amazons and leave her about-to-be husband to die!"

"You *must* trust me. This is too big a thing for any one of us to squabble over! It is the very finest of the Elder scientific methods of fighting the degeneracy that is man's curse. Radioactives cause this aging and degenerating in the race, and this 'dunder-mech' is the answer to the problem. But we do not have time to talk; your absence will be discovered. You must trust me and go. Would I bother with petty things? Steel, I mean the best!"

"Well, give me the data, a weapon, and a ship. I can't walk. I do not know how

to survive a journey on foot across Venus' swamps and jungles."

"We are going to disguise you, Steel. Then these friends of mine, the Nameless Ones, will do the rest."

I LOOKED at the two shrouded figures. They had dropped their veils, stood revealed as the girl who had guided me before, and as the young man called the Master. I smiled, but somehow I was disappointed. They had impressed me so very favorably on my first meeting, and then had shown so little ability when Nonur's blacks walked in upon them, that I had mentally assigned them to a pigeonhole marked "ineffectual."

The girl smiled sadly. I remembered then that she could read my mind, and I blushed at my uncomplimentary thoughts.

"This night we are going to make up for an age of mistakes by our race. We are giving our greatest secret, 'dunder,' to the good white Tuon race. What they do with it will be their fate."

"If I had some idea what 'dunder' was, I might be more enthusiastic," I grumbled, taking the folded sheets of metal foil Montagna was handing me.

That started his explanation. The words poured out . . .

"While you put on this armor I will try to give you an idea of what dunder is and what it can be when it is fully understood by competent technicians. It has never been properly utilized, though these Nameless Ones have partially learned how to get some uses out of it.

"Between man and woman vibrates a dual magnetism. The polarity of this magnetism is used on the creation of stim, a synthetic production of a similar magnetic flow to the flow of electric vital to life and necessarily composed of two separate kinds of electric, the male and female.

"The Elder race discovered and used a whole gamut of these divergently polarized electric and magnetic flows. They did not stop at male and female stim currents, but went on and created a vast variety of synthetic flows of stim electric. Some of them are known to you as the 'divine afflatus' and similar phenomena, produced by these rays."

"I understand," I murmured, "but what has that to do with age or immortality or a substitute method of defeating age for the

Tuons to use instead of baby blood? I don't get the connection."

"I didn't either at first. But I ran across some 'sacred' manuscripts in the possession of these Nameless Ones. It described a variety of beneficial flows of electric that nourish the growth of cells, determine their health, and ALTER THEIR NATURE BY REPOLARIZING THEIR INNER CONSTITUENTS! That is an all-important discovery—that by repolarizing a cell of the body, its very nature is definitely changed. The divine sensation one receives from some beneficial rays is due to the presence of these repolarizing pressures upon the body. The cell, under sufficient influence, becomes attuned to and receptive of much greater inductive energies, becomes stronger, and LOSES ITS ACQUIRED RADIOACTIVITY. Radioactivity and age are one and the same thing. That is why baby blood is effective, the glandular products of the child reorganize the cells of the body, wash out and neutralize the radioactive accumulations that are the cause of age."

"I begin to get a glimmer of what you mean!"

"This dunder-mech is their final and complete development of the possibilities inherent in a knowledge of the FACT of female and male divergent polarity in the cell batteries. In dunder this is used to dynamize a living substance in a new way, a vital battery that can be repolarized, renews unproductive and aged flesh in a new relation to the circumambient energy fields, in a way that automatically neutralizes the destructive radioactive induction from the sun——"

"Okay, Montagna, you win. I will leave it there."

Montagna buckled about my limbs a suit of the flexible black metal—plast armor he had always worn. Others had refused it as too confining, but it is the only sensible thing to wear in ray-battles, as it is impervious to many deadly rays. He put an ancient flame-sword about my waist, and hung a ray-pistol beside it. He shook my hand, pushed me off through the gap in the great plate of ray-armor that was the door of his chambers.

OUTSIDE, I wondered as I strode after the swift gliding forms of the Nameless. I wondered whether something could hap-

pen *luckily* for me for a change?

I could nearly hear the thought pulsing between the two and some distant group of these nearly speechless people, a people in whom telepathic communication had nearly replaced oral. I could sense that somewhere a council of great importance was being conducted, and that the tall youth called the Master was listening and speaking to the members while his sister did the simple thinking necessary to guide the three of us through the maze of antique, mysterious passages.

When a man gets a little of that Elder science under his mental belt, it causes a bad case of scientific indigestion, for so much of their truths conflict with our "theories" and "accepted" untruths which we learn in school as "science." I had a very bad case of this indigestion. Dunder-mech! Phew!

"It makes of an evil man a good man, potentially, by inverting his mental polarity in relation to that of the sane normal man," Montagna had said . . .

I wondered, for it was hard for me to swallow that anything could make things like Nonur, or the monstrous transparent Yin Yan (for that was its name), a benevolent creature. I snorted. Montagna, for all his hard-headed, sinister, clever ways, was a sentimentalist to think such a thing. Under the domination of Yin Yan, in Nonur's hands, dunder-mech, dunder-stim, dunder synthetic flesh, all would become yet more lures to catch and hold the innocent in the toils of evil destructive processes. It was my greatest fear that this immense Elder wisdom which he, Montagna, had given me on the thin metal-foil papers, should fall into Nonur's hands before I got clear of these dark labyrinths under Nicosthenes.

I had gathered that the slim, ineffectual Nameless had lived for an age here under the Seven Cities on little but their knowledge of dunder, or synthetic foods, in little sun and less exercise. Their way of life had made them slender and weak, but "dunder" had kept them well and of good intent toward the human race. Healthier by far than the evil things that other caverns in *some* places have spawned!

Now that the fine technicians of the Sea People and the Tuons were to have this "dunder" formula, it would be another tool for good. It must not fall into the hands

of the monopolizers of all that is good from the past. I listened, as I walked, to my memory repeating Montagna's words: "This formula is for a dynamo that will revivify with vital force by relating the flesh in a new way to energy without, outside the body, providing it with new mouths to feed on magnetism. As a kiss stimulates a woman or a man, a kiss from a dunder-covered robot revitalizes the inner cells of either male or female. It itself is the two poles of sex electric in operation as a battery of flesh. It is both male and female and more beside. As a magnet partakes of the qualities of a gyroscope by reason of its circular field, so do the poles of dunder matter . . ." I gave up! It was all Greek to me. I would carry the papers, but I refused to bother my head about what I could not comprehend. "New polarization for a richer flow of these fluid sources of energy from the womb of all energy . . ." My voice mimicked Montagna's in hopeless humor.

THE two graceful figures glided ahead of me, down long slanting ramps connecting the levels. Then we got into a sled-like conveyance which floated a few inches off the floor. The Master touched a simple one-dial control on the curving dash of the sled, and it began a trip I shall not forget. It darted off, smooth and effortless and quiet, at a terrific acceleration. A thin, barely visible black line in the center of the wide boring seemed to be a leadstring for what must have been an electric eye in the front of the sled. It swooped down the long ramps, along the endlessly complex ways of the levels, following some particular route line among the other lines that converged upon it and crossed occasionally. Minutes later, but God knows how many miles deeper, the sled pulled to a stop with a deceleration as severe as the start. I arose, followed the rapidly gliding pair of figures, my breath and pulse immensely increased in rate.

Into a vast arching chamber they led me, and my eyes could not take in the Elder art—which is always so arresting—for wondering just what these people gathered here expected: there were so many! I could not guess how many. The chamber was immense, the faces lost themselves in the shadowy reaches of the place, and everywhere, squatting side by side, were

the white-robed figures of the Nameless, their faces half hid by the white, semi-transparent, and delicately glistening veils, their bodies indistinct in the soft robes. Ring after ring they stretched; male and female, young and old, and their eyes were strange and somehow wise and wearily waiting. It was as if they had sat thus for an age, and were only now opening their eyes upon a new hope of life.

At the center of the rings of people reclined a dozen very old men and women, and they raised their white heads as the Young Master glided ahead of me and the girl, raised his hand and sent his thought pulsing to them. The white heads turned those dim eyes toward me, and I raised my hand and thought as strongly as I could.

"I am here to help, if I can understand what to do." It was all mysterious to me, I could not conceive of these people here beneath Nonur's strength and her knowing nothing of it. Yet what thought I could read was wary with the thought of hiding, of secrecy. "Nonur must never know."

One of the aged figures rose and walked slowly toward me, took me by the hand and led me to the center of the circle of the Nameless Council.

I could almost feel the concentrated thought of that host pulsing into my mind, and in short minutes I had absorbed a history of a great people, as well as a terrific compulsion to do or die that they might complete their purpose and fulfill their ancient destiny. It was a thrilling and a weird experience for me. I was in instant contact with a host of minds, their concentrated strength of will and time-strengthened purpose flowed into me with a freshening renewal of soul such as none of Hecate's horrible treatments had ever given me. Strength of body she had given me, yes, but not this inner might, this iron of the mind with which these people were arming the inner self of Big Jim Steel—arming me with a spiritual or mental strength to match the muscled exterior nature had given me.

Words were superfluous. I understood exactly what had passed in the long dreary time of centuries that had been, and exactly what they expected to cause to happen within the next few days or weeks . . . or years, if need be. I knew that Nonur was ignorant of the real numbers and nature of these Nameless People, had moved

in overhead while they silently watched from the depths of the Elder Cities; watched while she batten on the blood of the marsh-men's children; watched while she lied to and deluded the same marsh-men of Nicosthene and while her servants spread out through the upper caverns of the cities underlying the Seven Cities of the Deathless Kings. Watched—and made ready for her fall while she slaughtered and tortured and brought low all the long centuries of development they had lavished on the once-savage marsh-men. For they were the Seven Deathless Kings, had propagated the illusion of immortality in very much the same way early Christians were supposed to be taken up to Heaven alive and in plain sight of everyone. For long centuries the Deathless Kings had been thus elevated by some mummery, and which the seventh son inherited at the time of his elevation. This mysterious and very sacred ceremony among the marsh-men was what Donar had spoken of as his father's coming "Elevation."

THEIR purpose in this illusion was good, they needed this awe of the King from the savage marsh-men to compel implicit obedience. And they got it, till Hecate came, found the dunder-mech and formulae, and planted her men there among the Nameless' ancient caverns to obtain the secrets of dunder in full.

Dunder was the only thing in their short intense inculcation of my mind that I had trouble in understanding. Which was only natural, it being one of the more complex of the mighty Elder race's achievements. It is quite probable that they did not fully understand dunder themselves and hence were unable fully to convey the meaning to me.

Dunder was a flesh-like synthetic plastic, very complex and containing virtues and powers no other substance contained. It was the great secret. Hecate had given me the map to locate. It was the mightiest, yet the simplest of all the Elder race's vast achievements. Dunder was the staff of their rather wonderful life. The walls of their chambers were lined with the living, flesh-like synthetic. Their robots were covered with dunder. And they had such robots as I never saw in any of the Elder cities. Now they were "taboo," lay unused. Another inexplicable custom.

Dunder was a kind of synthetic-flesh-battery, generating a strong flow of vital electric within itself. This electric was a potent neutralizer of "de," and as such had a very startling effect upon character and upon the thought of those who were in contact with it.

As I learned more about it, I realized the worst of Hecate's luck had operated when she had been too busy with her warning sufficiently to probe the possibilities and uses of dunder and the nature of these people whose life was founded on the use of dunder.

But, like Hecate, I found myself under the stress of an urgent need for action. Nonur had decided to eliminate the Nameless of whom she knew, and whom she thought were all of the Nameless race. These dwelt in the higher level caverns, under her eyes, in constant contact with her blacks and her ray warriors. That they did not know of the dwellers in the deeps spoke volumes for their intense devotion to the need for secrecy, volumes for their mental powers, that could delude Nonur's tél-augs with false thought. Truth was, but a few members of the upper race knew of the existence of the lower race of the Nameless. These were the youth called the Master and his sister, and two of their immediate officers. The rest had evidently been treated hypnotically to make them forget the details of their past which would be informative to Hecate's agents.

Nonur's ships and armed sleds were even now deploying through the great cavern highways toward the dwelling caves of the upper Nameless. She expected little resistance, and she meant to wipe them out to a man. Whether it was their assistance in removing me from her arena prison, whether it was some other cause which precipitated the anger of Nonur upon their heads, I did not know, and I suspected, neither did they. They had long expected such a decision from her, for she had not Hecate's intense interest in their knowledge of the ancient sciences. She had only a fear of them and their knowledge, and she meant to get rid of that fear. Too, she obeyed Yin Yan, the tank-dweller.

The young Master led me at a trot from that council meeting, toward the vast underground hangars and factories which they had kept a secret so long.

Even as we came out of the long boring

into the activity of the Nameless' secret hangars and machine shops, a slow grey mist rose above the ranks of orderly arranged vehicles, above the scurrying figures of the slight-statured Nameless; hovered over the whole scene with a strange intense life and perception pulsating within the grey swirling cloud. I looked at the Master questioningly, but he did not answer, only ran forward and prostrated himself before this swirling cloud, his mind evidently commanding with the dread, powerful presence that even I sensed so strongly as to be frozen with awe before the inexplicable evidence of supernatural power. I tried hard to use my weak powers of telepathic perception, managed to make out some of the youth's words, and the awful answers from that strange life of mist.

"O Mother Etidorpha,⁴ from the bowels of the primal you come, from the ages of past life you survive, and you alone know the truth. Tell me, guide me, help me be and do what is best for our race, for your loye of ourselves as your vehicle—answer now and aid us against this evil!"

"My little pink son, my less-than-nothing ant, my child of the starving time of this world, tied here as am I by the circumstances of my nature—that is why I have arisen from my ancient bed in the core of our world. That is why now I rise to you from the rivers that drop into the deeps. Against the creature, Yin Yan, I intend to help you with my poor powers; live or die, he must be destroyed. For he means death to men and to all love. Fling your fleet against Nonur's bloody might and foolish pride and desperate evil, and I will spin the wheels of chance for your people. It is not meet that such as Yin Yan and his tool, Nonur, should rule over the Nameless or over any creatures who bear still a spark of the God-blood and spirit within their puny bodies. Time will turn again, and your race will ride the tides of Tee toward greatness when they run this way through space. I know; I will help you reach that future. Go . . . !"

IN a strange, blind awe I groped after the youth *through the mist* of HER body,

⁴ This strange rock-dwelling spirit is one of the legends of the caves. I call it Etidorpha to remind those who have read that book of the corroboration.—Author.

entered the sleek flat-bottomed ship, placed myself beside the slim youth at the weirdly complex controls of the craft. The ship lifted, and even as we flashed across the vast chamber in the deeps, the mist-like sphere drifted into the rock and seemed to race into invisibility after us—or before us. One could hear a vast purr as of the life-force itself pulsing into motion and flowing through the rock about us—and I knew only that such things as mysterious Gods still existed on this old planet Venus! Legend had been shown to be truth so very many times to me that I had no mental recourse but to accept them all, every tiny lie of all the unbelievable fairy tales, as having a skeleton of solid incontrovertible truth.

I did not dare to ask the youth about the weird phenomena, or what this Etidorpha might be, what she might be able to accomplish. After having seen Yin Yan, I could believe anything! Where had that creature been when first I met Nonur back on Earth? With her? Or waiting here in these caverns for her return, subtly willing her actions across even that span of distance. That Nonur, as a part of Yin Yan, was thus vastly able, was a creature of the abyss of time itself, was the servant of a monster unbelievable to even my calloused credulity, was a surprise I could not recover from easily. Now this, to find the Nameless race worshipping a *mist* from the core of Venus, a pulsing, living ethereal creature of the rocks of the planet itself!—was all too much! I sat and waited and clutched my flame-sword and ray-pistol and waited a chance to fling myself into battle against enemies of—of . . . *Etidorpha!*

CHAPTER VI

Awareness is increased by setting up mental mechanisms that operate dynamically of themselves and by analyses and syntheses of thought forms take old rigid symbols and forms and blast them with searching thought, creating them anew, so be they are worth new creating.

Elder Writings.

SHE is the one responsible for our being able to keep our numbers and living places secret from the men of Hecate and their later leaders. She caused them to dis-

regard us—now she flings herself into battle for us. She is an *ancient Goddess* indeed."

The youth's thought pulsed into me intensely. I could not escape listening if I had wanted. I thought:

"It is not possible, but it is . . . FACT!"

"She will tell us where they are, even how to avoid being trapped by their tactics. She will cause them to make mistakes, to do that which will cause them to fall before us. You will see. None can stand before the mist from the depths."

"One can almost believe in a God when one sees the truth of the theory of ethereal beings displayed thus!"

"Do you not believe in a God? You are comical, my big brother!"

"I did not, but logic compels acceptance, now."

"The far etherean worlds are *full* of life and mighty rulers. They do not approach Earth or Venus or the sun. Etidorpha was trapped here, may die before the awful eons of the cyclic round rolls Tee tides here and make the ether possible for her travel. Now it is space filled with destruction for her, she cannot leave the protection of the deep rocks of Venus."

"Tee tides! So space is filled with fluctuations of the integrative energies? I almost understand."

"The great races follow these intensities of Tee, revel in life and growth and power, avoid the cyclic tides of Dee which cause vast areas of space and the planets in space to become uninhabitable by immortals."

Even as he talked the Master flung the slim ship toward the head of a long column debouching from several small tunnels upon a great transcontinental boring, a river-wide roadway across the planet, I knew from experience.

Speeding forward in the distance was a fleet of ships, small spacers and air vessels adapted to weapon-carrying for this attack by Nonur—a less uniform, more heterogeneous collection of ships than the Nameless'. But I knew Nonur was not a tyro, and I had little faith in the youth beside me. Somehow he did not seem made of warrior metal to me. He heard my disparaging thought, laughed softly to himself. He was full of confidence, and handled the craft, which was strange to me, with the hands of a veteran.

The shorter fans went up ahead of us

across the face of the speeding enemy, and long streams of luminous rays spouted from the noses of the half-visible vessels, filling the vast place with particles of luminous matter, flung out by the rays designed for that purpose, to bring an enemy into an obscuring cloud of phosphorescent particles. This could not have been done on the surface, but was practical in the great highway cavern, because the light seemed to bounce off the walls and reflect endlessly, giving vision a deceptive duality.

Our hulls seemed magnetically to attract these light-charged ray-flung particles, and we became within instants bright gleaming targets for the dis rays Nonur's ancient sharpshooters flung at us.

Our own shorter fans were out now, and blocked off most of my vision. Against this black curtain our fleet sped with fearful audacity. I could not see anything but darkness, but the hand of the youth was sure on the guide bar. Straight as a string we sped toward the heart of the enemy fleet.

Now and then beams of blistering heat burst through the curtain of blackness, missing us by feet. I clenched my fists, ducked my head in expectation of the seemingly inevitable crash with the walls which were invisible to me, with the enemy ships which were likewise invisible and magnified by that blackness and my fears into targets we could not miss with our bulk.

Most of our weapons, I knew, were salvaged, were adapted from the antique mechanisms adapted to war purposes for which they were never meant to be used.

But some seemed to bear the imprint of a lesser, later hand, might be the product of the Nameless' own hands in modern times.

SUDDENLY the shorter-fans blinked out before us, and we were at point-blank range! From all about me the Nameless fired, once, twice—and as suddenly the shorter went on again, all at once, perfectly co-ordinated. As the fleet wheeled, stopping, racing back a few feet above the smooth floor, I realized that the mental contact of these Nameless telepaths gave them an advantage in such maneuvers that could not be overestimated.

"Now," I could hear the Master's puls-

ing, vibrant young thought again, exulting, "we will lead them up and out onto the surface gardens near Nicosthene, let the green men see the defeat of their wonderful Nonur, see her vicious and tricky and evil in battle. Perhaps they will even attack her, too. They have hated her doings so long, blamed the evil upon us, their ancient rulers. Now let them see for themselves what beings they have chosen. In the battle we may have a chance to show the marsh-men what it is that is trying for mastery of the Seven Cities. I do not think they will want any more of it . . ."

Fast as thought, the levitated ships sped smoothly along the tremendous ancient highway. Sometime in the past, the fires of that tremendous volcano, now gone out forever, had eaten through the super-hard walls of the ancient borings, left a space along the wall where light glared through from the sun in the valley of the crater. Into this opening the Master shot his craft, after us streamed the rest of the fleet, arrow-shape after arrow-shape spinning up through the tree-lined opening of the vast primeval garden that was the crater. Up and up, spinning in a tight spiral in the center of the valley. The cyclopean cliffs that ringed the terrific precipitous bowl fled downward past our slim, backward sloping wings. Out beneath us shot the black craft of Nonur's evil crew. Into the sunlight, and up and up and up. The ships below fired steadily now, but it is not easy to hit a ship at that rate of speed. One of our number fell, a long smoke plume marking the plunge to death of the Nameless crew. Needle rays of dis burnt the air about us as we arrowed over the last rampart of the terrible valley of the Ungi, over the white-capped hump of the vast mountains, down onto the slopes where lay Nicosthene, a luxurious-looking city from the air, flowering plants and whitened rock buildings making it gay as if for a holiday.

Straight over the great city gardens, terraced and patterned with clipped flowering shrubs, where the young marsh-men walked their maids of an evening, but now full of laughing children suddenly screaming with fear, sped the fleet, circling the whole great city in minutes.

Below us the green, web-footed people poured from their houses onto the railed walkways that surrounded every great building, their eyes looking up at us like

suddenly opened round flowers, their mouths gaping redly in wonder and fear as we shot past the great walls of the buildings in short hard turns, ducking the lanc-ing fire of Nonur's ships.

The Master was bringing his battle out into the open where the marsh-men could see it!

WHETHER he had made a mistake or whether he had planned it that way—from the great central buildings of the city of Nicosthene great stationary rays rose, lifting like searchlights, dulling the sun with their bright lances of fire. Where they touched a ship, that ship fluttered, stalled, glided or spun to earth. Soon the whole parklike expanse around the great city was strewn with ships. For the most part these were uninjured, were both Nonur's and our own, and even as I wondered what next our own ship shuddered, the deathless engines from the hands of the Elder race faltered, hummed again, faltered and stopped. We glided gently to a landing among the star-flowered grasses.

I had no more time for watching the whole vast scene of the conflict, for nearby lay one of the dark, unpolished ships of Nonur's fleet, its sides never cleaned of the mottling hand of time as had been the Nameless' ships. I bounded through the wide door of our craft even as she touched Earth, was running toward this ship, tugging with one hand at my flame sword, with the other at my ray-pistol. If there was a chance to kill a vampire, I wanted it. To let that baby blood forever free of its vile prison . . .

From the cabin doors of the low craft leaped toward me the red leader of the crew. Behind him were a dozen of the cumbrous-bodied, black duck-footed men, a half-dozen renegade Tuon males, three marsh-men, their usually frank faces marked with the signs of their enslavement to the vile pleasures of the vampires' seducing tactics. Unhappy creatures, I knew only too well what temptations and what awful fears had placed them in Nonur's ranks, but a man can not pause in battle to try the enemy. As I ran toward them I triggered the ray pistol steadily, weaving on my feet to avoid their bolts. My hair rose on my head, singed and curling, the tip of my ear wilted into a painful mass, and I was close enough to swing the great flame-sword.

THE red leader leaped to meet me, his own slim blade singing to meet mine. The sparks of the deadly flame sword made a great arc of heat as the blades touched. His own wilted, the steel burnt off near the hilt. I ran him through. With the smell of his burnt flesh rank in the slow air, I spun to meet the next, wondering vaguely why Nonur had not given her men flame-swords, thinking she had been too sure they would not need them against the puny Nameless Ones.

Beside me I found the soft shrouded shapes of my Nameless telepathic companions, in their hands strange rods of glittering metal, their fingers triggering these peculiar weapons.

What it was I know not, but the fierce faces of the great black warriors relaxed, fell into frozen imbecility. They nodded sleepily, fell to the grass, their arms twitching convulsively. It was a weapon that put them hors-du-combat, that was all that mattered. I did not have time to wonder if they were dead or only paralyzed, before the tail of the ship beside which we had fought so briefly was rounded by a column of blacks, their great feet flopping in haste, their swords gleaming, and in their hands the ray-rifles I had seen in the chamber of the thing, Yin Yan, the tank monster.

Seeing us, their ungainly run stopped, they knelt, brought the rifles to shoulder, began to fire at point blank range. I triggered two bolts of flaming dis at them from my pistol, stopped—There was nothing worth shooting at! The energy rods in the hands of the Nameless had taken care of them.

Feeling that the battle was won before it began, I raced around the long tail of the ship, turning toward the hedge-rows where the tops of a cluster of wrecked ships showed a group of the enemy had come to earth. I was going to town on that bunch. The blood raced hot in my veins. I wanted to kill and kill, until no more of that brood of evil remained on the planet.

Here I saw that all was not going as the Master expected, for out of the garden itself, where the soil was burned away, were pouring row after row of sleds, gun-mounted vehicles. Nonur's forces had not all taken to the levitator ships. Some had trailed our flight with penetray, followed along under the chase in the upper caverns, and had seen the ships brought low by the

defenses of Nicosthene which could not tell friend from foe but wanted no alien ships cluttering up their sky.

These, I saw, had used their heavy, vehicle mounted dis-rays to burn a path upward from the caverns below, had come out into the scene of battle blasting away at all sides. The thin line of white-robed Nameless, who had almost surrounded the warriors from the grounded ships, had almost finished them, were now being mowed down in rows by the flaming scythes from these sled-like vehicles.

Even as I crouched behind a flower-studded hedge, brilliant with scarlet blooms, watching this slaughter and wishing for some weapon potent enough to out-range the sleds' great beams—even as I sighted carefully along my pistol barrel and started to press the trigger to drop the man behind one of the dis-beams on the heavy sled nearest me, I felt a strange tug at my harness belt, the heavy armor tightened painfully, half choking me about my waist and neck. An irresistible force dragged me to the ground, tugged me through a thorny hedge, lifted me dangling into the air, up and up.

Straining, I turned against gravity, looked up. Overhead was a long slender needle of a ship; from it dangled a wire cable. From the cable dangled myself. The ship was lifting higher, higher, and the belt at my waist gave with a sudden rip. I was hundreds of feet off the ground, caught by impossible chance on the anchor-cable hook of an airship! Even as I seized the anchor to ease the strain on my waist, the belt parted. I swung suddenly by my hands over the bloody battle scene below. I needed all that Tee-ray strength given me by Hecate to hoist myself up, to place my feet on the prongs of the anchor. That antique ray-armor was light, but still not designed for climbing ropes.

"Ceulna."

My heart cried—in the hands of Nonur, her mind affected already, my odd, nameless, lovable telepaths fighting for freedom, the lovely city of Nicosthene dependent on the outcome, the lives of all the peoples of southern Venus hanging in the balance—and myself dangling at the end of an anchor rope on a ship going to what unknown spot of this strange planet on what nameless errand? Would I never win to a sight of my beloved again? Would I never live

to quench my anger and my steel in Nonur's blood, in the hearts of her band of Vampires? Would I never get a chance to tear the hated scarlet and gold from a blood-drinker? Would I never see that awful empire of evil finally brought low?

I DANGLED, hung on, and perhaps I prayed a little to some such Goddess as Etidorpha, the hovering, thinking, grey rock-mist of the deeps below Nicosthene. Was that an illusion, perhaps? A lifelike delusion born of hope and prayer and years of worship by the telepathic Nameless? It could well be!

Taking the scraps of my torn armor-belt I made myself fast to the metal cable with them, made myself as comfortable as possible to ride out this unasked trip to nowhere.

Even as I completed the job of lashing myself to the swinging cable, the ship above me loomed closer. The cable was being wound into a gaping cavity in the bottom of the long, taper-ended cylinder above.

The apparently absent-minded pilot above seemed to have remembered his dragging anchor at last, touched a button to rewind the drum. I hastily slashed the lashing I had just completed, with visions of myself being wound around a cable drum like a sausage.

As my clutching fingers approached the revolving drum, my body still swung in the slipstream; it was either let go and drop all those thousands of feet into that mist-hung jungle of titanic growth below, or let myself be wound up into the cutting metal. Only strength and quick resolution saved me. Releasing my hands, my feet on the prongs of the anchor shoved my body up even as I toppled and my mouth opened in unavoidable chilling horror at the fearful distance to the ground below.

My clutching hands seized the edges of the now closing, inswinging, hinged hatch doors. The automatic closing machinery stuck for an instant at the sudden weight on the doors, stuck long enough for my desperately clambering hands to hand-over-hand up the edge of the hatch to the flooring of the ship. Swinging there by my hands alone, the released doors came on up to close about my chest, pressing painfully! I could raise myself up no farther. The doors gripped me just close enough to hold



I dangled, hung on and perhaps prayed a little to the Goddess of Eridorpha, hovering over the rock-mist of Nicosthene

my straining muscles.

Grimly I hung, and again chance stepped in! The pilot, perhaps failing to hear the *slap* of the closing doors, or told of the jam by the door controls failing to return to normal, joggled the door switch again. They fell open to full width, started slowly closing again. I swung my body up to the floor of the craft, lay there on the cold, smooth metal, panting, half unconscious with strain. The doors snapped shut beside me.

After a long moment, when my racing heart had stilled and my arms ceased to quiver, I looked about, taking in my surroundings. It was unbelievable to me that the people of this ship could have failed to notice the battle, the long chance which had swung the anchor under my belt, myself dangling—yet such seemed the case. Cautiously I moved, pushed my still trembling limbs erect.

Who were they, to pass unhindered where but minutes before two fleets had been downed by the defense ray of Nicosthene? They must be personages known to the warriors of Nicosthene well, even better than they knew the Nameless, or the Hagmen!

When the anchor had seized me in its grip, I had dropped the pistol I had been aiming at the distant war-sled. I felt for the grip of my flame sword, felt reassured as I tugged it free of its insulative sheath, pressed the trigger, felt the deadly heat with gratitude.

Whoever they were, if I got close enough to use this, they would not argue overmuch!

If the ship had been on a course toward the north, I would have remained silent and unseen in the small compartment of the anchor cable, but I knew that the ship was bearing due west. I felt that each moment was taking me farther from Ceulna, perhaps forever from any possibility of seeing her. If I could but get to the Tuon cities, bring down those magnificent Amazons upon Nonur's crew, blast them forever from life and release my sweet Tuon maid before the cruel lusts of the vampire crew destroyed her! My own melodramatic thought startled me with its intensity. Was it possible that I saw myself as a knight, fighting for his fair one against death and dishonor? It was a strange feeling for me who had so long been ashamed of every

breath I had drawn.

CASTING aside these speculations, I resolved to know just what the ship contained, perhaps to inveigle or force them to take me to the great city of Lefern, where I knew that Nonur's doom, at least, would soon be inescapably planned, perfectly executed.

A tiny door, just large enough for a man to creep through, gave upon my push. I peered hopefully. A stack of furs rewarded me. Furs where two or three people had been sleeping was all. I slipped through the vacant bunk chamber, peered through the next door into the pilot room.

I had thought I had left horror behind! Sitting in the dual control seats were two visions of . . . terror!

Tuon harness, Tuon tattoos, there the resemblance to my loved warrior women ended! *What* was masquerading as a Tuon ship? What diseased spawn of some abyss of the swamps of Venus had donned that jeweled harness, had taken this Tuon ship, set out to see the world and infect it with its purulence? Scabrous, emaciated, their plumed head-dresses awry over straggling white hair, their hands, clutching the controls, bony and red with sores . . . I could not help an exclamation of astonishment, of disgust, of anger at the masquerade.

"Ahhhhh!"

All three emotions mingled in my voice, I stepped through the door, my flame sword leveled, raising to blot the life from these monstrous caricatures of Tuon warrior women before they could turn and perhaps slay me with a glance of their diseased, venomous eyes. But I hesitated.

The female thing on the right turned her head slowly at the sound of my voice, slowly, wearily focusing red-rimmed bleary eyes on my face, one bony hand raised to hide the hideous sight from my male gaze. My sword ceased its upward motion, a terrible thought smote through the armor of disgust which had been my defense against the dislike of killing women. Were those tears, those great glistening drops upon the still silky lashes, white though they were?

Her voice, cracked and weak as the voice of a child or of a very aged person, came wearily to me, like the soft sound of a breeze across an old battlefield of skeletons and wreckage.

"Ah, it is the big Earth man. Remember

him, Leonora?"

The other witch-like figure turned her head slowly, seeing me, her hands raised to cover her hideous face as had her companions.

"Steel, how came you on this ship?"

"Who and what are you, creatures of evil, or the oldest Tuon women I have ever seen?"

"We are neither, Big Jim, but friends of yours in the battles against the witch, Hecate. This that you see is but the shell of what we were months ago. Horror has made its home with the Tuons since last you saw Lefern."

"You mean . . . ?"

I COULD not face the possibility. My mind leaped to the chances that their inference might not be true, that others of that beautiful race were not as these two, that I had not heard aright.

"You have been gone a long time, to know what has happened in your absence. The Tuon nation is doomed, dying! There are few whose appearance is better than our own. The dogs of Hecate's crew who escaped us loosed a terror among us that we have been unable to combat. What you see is the strength of the Tuons, shattered and broken. Our cities have not fallen, but only because we have not yet been attacked."

"I have been asked to go to the Tuons to summon help against Nonur. What you say is unbelievable to me. I cannot understand . . . ?"

"You *know* where this Nonur lies hidden! We have hunted her and the other reptiles who escaped us since the horror struck. We will take you . . . to our home. Ah, Steel, it is painful even to say *home*, for the life is gone out in it." The pilot swung the ship northward toward Lefern.

"I cannot understand . . . ?" I watched the great tears roll down her ruined face, across the seamed cheeks, the red sores that stood like islands of filth upon her grey cheeks and neck. Her hand raised to brush away the tears, a claw like a bird's, a scabbed bony body like a skeleton's. But it dropped again to the control wheel, too weary to complete its mission. A great sorrow rose and began to choke me, and that choking did not stop.

Hours went by. We neared the dread storm-belt.

Even as I resolved to ask questions of Leonora until her dulled mind had given me the full details of why this awful thing had happened to the Tuons, a shock racked through the light craft, spun her around like a child's toy in the wind.

I leaped to the controls, for the weakened body of Leonora had fallen to the deck of the spinning ship. The sky, horizon and the forested, hot swamps of the heat belt of the equator below us spin madly around and across the fore-vision plates, and my hands sank defeated from the semi-circle of the control wheel. For, extending down below us was the vast, tapering, black half-transparent cone of a twister, a tornado! A cyclonic phenomena of these equatorial regions of Venus, terrible in their strength, a thing through which even a space ship sometimes failed to live—and this craft was but a lighter-than-air craft, a flimsy straw in the titanic, devouring maw of a wind-sput!

The whirling motion grew greater, faster and faster the horizon sped across the view plates, about us great trees a thousand feet in length lashed their branches. Their torn root-masses lashed at us with black dripping hands, torn from the soft swampy beds below by the terrible grasp of the cone of wind-force. Water, earth, branches, clods of grasses, beasts, snakes, the mawled red-streaming form of a Genaulgl, a red warrior's dead body still clutching his hunting bow, his eyes staring, a branch of a tree driven through his chest—all these things and more tore past the vision plates in a mad circular dance, lifting and falling and lifting. The vibration shuddered through all the ship—my hands quivered. I could do nothing with them but cover my eyes and wait for the end.

Strangely, the end did not come, but the whirl grew quieter, the noise of the roaring wind gradually abated, the ship steadied. The heart of the thing had somehow flung us aside contemptuously and roared on toward vaster conquest.

I replaced my hands on the control wheel, brought the ship out of her stalling, spinning glide toward the reaching, mist-laden tree tops now too near. I felt with my half-awake faculties for the balance of the ship, presently had her on an even keel and drifting quietly. I cut in the jets, turned the nose northward again. The compass danced, began a slow turn, I was within

minutes pointing south. I fired the port jets, swung her north again, kicked on full jet with my foot—and spun madly around.

With a sinking heart I realized that some of those vast wind-whirled bodies of wood and flesh and earth about us had crashed into the jets, ruined and crushed one side, so that the ship could only be driven in a circle. With the very life of nations, the future of Earth as well as Venus dependent upon the flight of this ship swiftly northward to rouse the strength of the Tuons and the Mer-men against Nonur's hidden crew—the ship was damaged! How badly I could not know.

I RAISED from the pilot's seat; the ship, with the jets shut off, drifted gently on toward nowhere, level, with only a slight, steady loss of altitude.

I bent over Leonora's prone figure where she lay behind me, shook her gently by the shoulder, repellent as her flesh was to my touch. Was the awful plague that had marked her for death contagious? I did not know, must face it. As I shook her, her head rolled limply, her eyes goggled hideously up at me. A thin streak of pale crimson, hardly like blood at all, trailed across her forehead.

Stretching her body out straight, I examined her carefully. The thin, bony fingers so emaciated, the stick-like wrists, the great sunken eye-sockets, the soft spot over her eyes where her forehead had struck the deck. Quickly I saw that the plague had been of such a nature as to make her bones brittle beyond belief, for her forearms were bent at unnatural angles, her neck rolled in on connection with the proper motion of her head, her hair was matted redly over a soft pulpy place on her head. Whatever had befallen her it had made her body so fragile that even that slight fall had caused her death. I turned to her companion, examined her with dying hope. She leaned forward against the instrument board, and her forehead was crushed, a red ruin spread over whole portions of her face. Truly, something had bled the life out of the sturdy Amazons.

I was alone, above the unbelievably primal jungles of the heat-belt of Venus, my ship disabled and drifting ever deeper into the tossing sea of gigantic branches, still moving under the stormy winds left from the passing of the twister.

Desperately I went back to the controls, kicked on the jet lever, spun the ship aloft again and out of that titanic maelstrom of wind and tree-tops. The air quieted, and I locked the controls, sending the ship in a steady spiral—for she would go in no other direction—locked the stick to lift her gently higher and higher in that spiral. Then I crawled aft through the tapering tail to see what a good arm and a few tools might do with a smashed jet assembly.

As I crawled back through the battered tapering tail, the jets ceased their muted hissing, the ship nosed over, I could feel her fall.

I scrambled back. Whatever had gone wrong now? This ship was not going to stay in the air, I realized from the feel of her. The gas chambers must be pierced, her buoyancy less than normal, or she would have continued on an even keel even though the jets stopped. I reached the control room on a run, saw the green sea of branches reaching for me, cast off the locking device of the control.

Desperately I fought to bring up the nose, to get some kind of glide out of the ship, to decrease the rapidly accelerating fall-speed. I succeeded, but oh so slowly.

Suddenly all about me the great branches were whipping, their fronded tips splintering. Birds fled squawking in clouds. With a crash the ship burst one great limb, fell across two more, lay still.

I tried to get up from the deck where the last shock had thrown me, but my head went around like the black walls of the wind tunnel that had so recently chased this ship across the sky. I lay back, lay still. Overhead the soft leaves rustled, the sky peered through the leaves in blue patches. The wind had torn great round holes in the cloud-sheath and the blue sky was pleasant.

The rustling of the leaves grew louder. Something was moving across the branches nearby. I managed to raise myself to sitting position, peered from the clear crystal-blast windows.

I gasped. Men, running along the branches with the agility of spiders! Men, but whether they were painted in an insect pattern, or whether they were insect-men, I could not say.

Up and down their bellies transverse stripes of red and yellow gave them a caterpillar's brilliant repellance. Their limbs were covered with a similar pattern. Whorls

of green and brown spots marked their faces, their cheeks ringed their eyes. The brilliant insect coloring had been so well simulated as to be startling. But what kind of men would adopt a war-paint so hideous as the slimy creature which had originally worn that pattern? Closer they came, and my eyes peered and peered, for I had a thought, a concept impossible, but one I could not shake off. Was that weird pattern their own skin, or was it painted on? If it were their own skin, these were not men, but something very different from what one thinks of as man.

It wasn't ten or a hundred—the whole vast expanse of the tree-tops was swarming with them like a plague of queer-striped insects, boiling up from below, throwing long lines from vast limb to limb, swinging across, running the length of the limb and repeating. Within minutes the acres of green-and-brown-marked limbs of the forest adjacent were covered thick with them. The odd, soft hands puttered with the latch of the round door. I struggled up, pulled my pistol from my belt. It was a Tuon weapon from the body of Leonora.

THE door swung open, the supple, oddly wriggling green and red bodies twisted through the opening like serpents, with the same effect of revulsion that an adder would have given me, many times multiplied. Whatever these creatures, I knew they were far less than men, and perhaps more venomous. They gaped their mouths at me, round openings of wonder or spite, spaced with sharp-filed pointed teeth. Or were the points natural to them, nature's own equipment?

I spoke to them in the tongue of the Red Men; I spoke to them in the tongue of the marsh-men—which is not greatly different; in every different dialect I had picked up here on Venus . . . and got no answer. They only stared at me, at my weapon swinging significantly from one to the other of them, and wriggled out the door to make room for another. The sudden night of the Venusian hot-lands closed softly overhead, and still everywhere outside they rustled and jeeped softly to each other. As the darkness became too great to tell their movements, I tried to herd them out of the ship. But I heard a soft hissing. A yellow, powdery gas-like stuff spread through the chamber. The bodies piled suddenly on

top of me, and I found I was unable to even fire the gun.

They had given me some jungle form of the gas attack—were taking me off now to their own homes the better to inspect me? I did not know what to expect. On Earth, the filed teeth would have indicated cannibals; here it meant anything at all. The only race on Venus as low in the cultural scale as our own savage races were the great duck-footed blacks. This race I had never even heard of before.

Slung from a pole like an animal, they carried me skillfully across the gulfs of green leaves, along the mighty limbs, yards thick and level on top as a walk-way from the passage of a myriad of feet, smooth as polished flooring. Mile after mile—my wrists and hands were numb, my feet did not exist, my head hung swaying in a red mist.

At last the trip was over. They dropped me upon a platform of lashed poles, cut the vines about my ankles, pulled me to my feet. I shook my head, stared. The creatures swarmed everywhere. This was a metropolis of the treetops. Curious how similar to men they were, and yet were not men. Their bodies were different, their skins soft and glistening with moisture. The painted patterns were not painted, but were a reptilian or insect insignia. They were not men! The females were not nearly so similar to man, there was a boneless quality about their slim bodies, a slithering, sinuous motion that was not human in any way. I knew without investigation that they reproduced in some way very different from the human, for their bodies betrayed no wombs, the breasts were curiously small and hard, the structure subtly different.

After myself came a long procession through the trees, bearing on their heads every article from the Tuon ship—my ray-armor, my flame sword, the Tuon apparatus, everything detachable, the seat cushions, the fine soft silks of the Tuon clothing, the jeweled harness from the dead bodies, spare weapons from the lockers, a great ray-gun they had detached from the bow. Even the motors were detached and borne along part by part.

Over all this booty the people scrambled, smelling each thing like animals, lifting it into the light, laying it down, picking it up again. And all the while they kept up their eerie chittering and cooing; adding to it

the rolling, soft protruding eyes, the long drooping lips writhing in expressions which meant nothing whatever to my mind.

Particularly did the females find me interesting, pawing with their soft animal-like hands over my white skin, peering into my eyes, touching my lips with their fingers, pulling at my ears, stroking my muscles, cooing in awe over my great size. I felt that I could burst my wrist bonds and tear the whole mass limb from limb, but a curious lethargy was on me still from the strange gas attack, and I did not *wish* to do anything about escape. I could not think; I could only wonder: what comes next?

CHAPTER VII

"The Evening Wolves will be much abroad, when we are near the Evening of the World."

Cotton Mather

THEN, from far below the tree tops, far down in the green gloom, came a call—an ululating, piercing, commanding call. Mechanical in sound, there was yet a human quality. The call sounded like a noise made through a megaphone by an opera singer, perhaps.

At the eerie sound, the swarming, curious mob about me lost their divergence of interest, began to move in concerted sequence, began to slide down the great branching limbs and out of sight.

I was neatly tripped, my ankles again bound with a length of vine. Within seconds I was swinging at the end of a liana, and above, the liana was tossed from hand to hand carelessly as I descended from one climber to another down into the nearly stygian dimness of the forest floor. As an elevator these gaudily skinned sub-humans left much to be desired.

Slung once more from a pole like an animal, we swayed forward through the soft, wet soil. My head dropped, the view ahead was upside down. Dimly I made out titanic architecture—a vast structure lay here under these ancient trees of the jungle. From every cranny and carving of the time-stained stone sprang countless air-plants. Mosses trailed across the time-forgotten doorways and great arched windows. Orchids flung their subtle, sensuous colors from the ledges of the rock walls. Almost swamped under the growth, the titanic size

and weight of the rocks of its construction had saved it from the writhing roots that would have prized a lesser structure into fragments long ago.

Straight into the darkness of the colossal doorway my captors carried me, their feet now louder, rustling and slapping on the firm, mossy rock of the pavement. Into that gloom—why?

My head twisted, my upside down vision confused me even more than the weird sculpture. I looked at the staring long dead eyes of the statues that were never of human life, the vaulting arms that reached from vast shadowed wall to towering ceiling, the arms of the statues that were not men upholding the terrific dome. On through all this alien, time-dimmed splendor, and down through endless echoing passages, I was but one mote of a long procession of the reptilian, rustling horde of sub-men.

We were in one of the ruined cities of Venus. Built by no one knows what race or when, they lie scattered over most of Venus' surface. Are they the surface structures of the Elder race, built before the caverns were bored? Archeologists of Venus say not! They say they were a race friendly with the Elder race, that they built on the surface of some of the planets in which the cave-dwelling race burrowed so deep, but were so alien in nature and in needs that there was little intercourse between them. But, like Earth historians and antiquarians, they are probably as wrong in their analysis of these ruins as Earth is in her false history of the past.

The truth is no one knows when they were built or who built them, since they are the product of a hybrid race which they are unable to relate to the true Elder race of man. They cannot read their inscriptions, they cannot decipher their few remaining writings in any way—and they cannot understand their science, of which there is vast evidence.

Most of these ruins lie in the wilds of Venus' jungles, far from traveled routes, and are little visited or spoken of. For the reason that they were a race supposedly inferior to the Elder race, of whom such a study is made, they form one of the neglected pages of Venusan history.

This much I knew of these ruins—from hearing Ceuina discuss them with her cultured Amazonian friends—and no more.



The foremost of the queerly patterned little man-beasts crept

THE procession of which I formed a part wound on down into total darkness. We were now beneath the ground, and some of the creatures ahead took small boxes from their belt pouches, struck flame with a stroke as though with flint on tinder, held aloft tiny torches that glowed yellowish, smouldered fitfully. On and on padded the soft animal-like feet.

Abruptly the passage widened and we came at last into a tremendous, vaulted, underground, temple-like place.

Upon a throne of white metal, still and motionless as death, was seated a figure. The foremost of the red-brown queerly patterned little man-beasts crept toward this figure on his hands and knees, his eyes rolling upward to the staring eyes of the motionless figure. As his torch guttered with his movement, the light seemed to activate the figure, the head moved strangely, mechanically. The figure rose, slowly, majestically! The arm rose, an arm lovely and shapely as a sculpture, yet as cold and lifeless as a . . . robot!

I knew, that instant, that these primitives worshipped *an ancient robot!* That

this mechanical thing, so human in appearance, so lovely as to be divine to a primitive mind, had—through the centuries since they had found her seated there motionless—become their tribal goddess, their fetish, their omnipotent substitute for a mythical creator!

For it was a robot of a type I had seen before in the caverns of the Nameless! There, the Nameless had not activated the robots, but left them about in just such postures as this one had been when we entered, waiting for the mechanic's hand to replace the wires to the sensory organs, to recharge the batteries. For some obscure reason, the robots were taboo to the Nameless.

That these creatures had no concept of the existence of a robot, that the mechanical accident that had left this robot with the electric eyes set to be activated by light, had given them the simple reality of a super-natural being, who lived on and on immortally-moving or speaking only when approached.

I laughed aloud at the simplicity, the naive beauty and humor of the accident



forward toward this motionless figure on his hands and knees

that had given these people a GOD!

Their heads turned to me, their brows frowning, their reptilian voices hissing me to silence and to reverence. The chief, whom I supposed to be chief or high-priest, crept on toward the robot, stopped a few feet from her knees.

The robot spoke, a low, lovely chanting voice that no human could equal in beauty. Whoever had built this forgotten pile and this underground temple had known how to build a robot to surpass in appearance anything the human race produces today in life.

The words were nothing of familiar sound to me, but to the rustling multitude they seemed to make some kind of sense. Perhaps they did understand that antique forgotten language. Perhaps their own ancestors had been servants to or perhaps had been, once, the very race which had constructed the magnificent structure. Who could say today?

Whatever the cause, whether through the centuries in which they had worshipped this animate simulacrum of life they had learned to interpret the robot's speech

records, whether the robot and themselves were such familiar compliments of their everyday life that from children on they had heard and answered the complex patterns of the robot's speech, learned it as children learn language from their mother's knees, they spoke to that lovely thing that was not living—but appeared to be much more than life is today—and the robot answered.

They appeared to be discussing myself, looking at me as the robot turned her lovely head, covered with a soft, rustling hair that I knew must be fine wires as soft as hair, but indestructible. Whatever the words, whatever the meaning, the robot flung up her hand in a fine simulation of divine anger, cursed them, so far as I could see from appearances, reviled them from fools, sent them scuttling from the temple in shame. Me, they left behind, lying upon the floor with my hands and feet bound to a carrying pole.

When the last of them had fled from the anger of their Goddess, that lovely imitation of the divinity of womanhood descended the long ramp of the dais, graceful per-

fection of movement, balanced achievement of mechanical mastery, approached my prone body.

WIIDE-EYED, wondering, shivering with a strange fear of the unknown, I waited. Bending over me, she lifted one eyelid with a doctor's touch, peered into my eye as she held it open. I knew that she was but the product of a complex set of interchangeable inner recordings, that her movements had no meaning as such, but were only automatic responses set to act upon predetermined stimulations.

My prone position had set in place the record which determined her actions. She was now the doctor, the scientific medical man of that time-forgotten race that had built her. Her long, tapered, unnaturally flexible fingers touched my pulse . . . found the ropy vines about my limbs. With a click a knife shot out of her wrist, slashed the vines with microscopic misses of my skin. I was free and alone with this . . . this . . . I had no words. Still the doctor, she listened to my heart by bending her lovely, stiffly coiffured hand to my breast. I was afraid to move for fear of setting off some other train of predetermined reactions which would perhaps cause the robot to decide I was enemy—to be destroyed. One could not know what complex duties she had been created to fulfill.

She began to strip off what clothes I had left. My suit of flexible ray armor I had removed after my undesired ascent of the anchor cable; now I lost the last remnants of my garments. Nude, I stood *embarrassed* before a female robot!

Swiftly her long, flexible, synthetically padded hands slid about my body, pressing here, touching there, looking for breaks or bruises. To aid her in this ministering series of recorded reactions clicking somewhere within her machinery, I groaned.

In a minute I was sorry. Her long, supergraceful and strong arms picked me gently from the floor, carried me to a doorway behind the dais. There, in a room scrupulously clean, completely free from any signs of age or of primitive occupancy, she took from a wall cabinet a case of vials, selected one, poured it into a small beaker. This, without myself being able to refuse her for fear of upsetting the beneficent reactions, she poured down my throat, stood back to watch the effect.

"*Blue lightning?*" I gasped, choking. It was a stimulant to end all stimulants. A glow of vitality flung flaming energy through my body. I said:

"Listen, mama machine, I don't want to upset you, but I don't know how not, either. I don't know how, but I sure wish I could talk your language. I'd have a man-to-robot talk with you. I need you, mama mech, if you only know *how much* I need you!"

She peered at me as if in surprise. Strongly her electric thought pulsed into my mind.

"I understand thought. What is it you need me about? I can find nothing seriously wrong with you. You seem suffering from shock, from improper diet, there are irregularities . . . But in this period there is no healthy norm. You are far above the norm in life expectancy."

I stared in now complete confusion. I realized that whoever had built her had been a being superior to myself as a man is to a fly. Chance might have given me here a weapon above all antique weapons, a creature with thought complex and flexible enough to be *better* than the simple set of reactions and confused logic patterns which are the human norm. A being who *knew* the ancient Venus, would be able to acquaint me with everything of importance which might still remain in a usable state, and who would have an automatic and complete defense pattern ready in her automatic mind of a nature superior to anything the minds of Nonur and her crew could devise.

Desperately I talked, thinking hard and intensely, trying to tell her the condition of Venus, the terrible fate that had overtaken my loved Tyon amazons, the fate of my beloved Ceuina, of Nonur and her use of children for prolonging life, of Yin Yan. And, too, I told her of Etidorpha, for I suspected there would be implanted in her a command to serve the mysterious Elder race of whom Etidorpha was one—or was at least one of their greater lie-creations.

SHE stood immobile, her face completely mask-like and expressionless, only a tiny flicker of a phosphorescent gleam in her strangely bright eyeballs to tell me that within her synthetic body the equivalent of life sat and listened to my thought.

"Have you heard? Have you under-

stood? Can you, are you, a sufficiently complex creation to serve the human race as once you served your creators?"

"I have a compulsion of loyalty to this Etidorpha. To the others you mention, I have no reaction. I must think!"

"Can you think, lovely thing? Are you a true equivalent of independent life, or are you but a series of blind reactions as a robot would be—if today they could build one?"

"I *can* think. But there are implanted certain blocks to prevent me from becoming a weapon in alien hands. One of those blocks is a command never to kill. I can render opposing life unconscious, capture them, but I may neither kill nor allow a lesser being to kill."

I understood now her anger at the primitive beings who worshipped her. They had probably asked her permission to dispose of me and had set off her block-reaction against all killing.

Back into the mighty vaulted temple she led me and seated herself upon the throne upon the dais. Her voice was soft, musing, human and lovely as the sun upon new-brushed hair.

"An age ago my creator placed me upon his throne, commanded me to guard it until her return. That was so long ago I have lost the means of recording it. My time-record unit is broken. Still, I guard and wait. Now you ask me to leave my ancient loyalty! In my time I have fought off legions of attackers from the walls above. Long ago, when the planet was more densely populated. 'Stim treasures', they wanted. Bah!"

"It is weird to hear you express disgust. Are all humans disgusting to you?" My mind was in a daze, furiously it worked to miss no slightest detail of this miracle of mechanics, this wonder of electronics of the past.

"Most humans are disgusting to me, my friend. I knew the Elders, remember. I knew the mighty of the far past, before age came."

"Was there no age, then?" In my keyed-up condition, I had passed every thought directly to her. The stimulant helping, she heard my every reaction so that we carried on a conversation unavoidably complex, mentally complete! She answered every thought and every question my excitedly teeming mind dwelt upon before myself could possibly have found the answer in my

memory if it existed. We were welded by her sensitivity into one mind, mine blank, questioning, puzzled and despairing, hers listening to mine, answering all my questions expertly while her own independent electric ego was afar off in fields of thought I could not even follow, though I heard.

"There were whispers of its coming, and of other disasters to overtake this planet. It was to investigate these reports from space that my master and mistress left. I surmise that because the reports were true they never returned. I have an emotion that acts as a pain. It is always with me."

Lugubriously she turned those mechanically perfect orbs upon me, ludicrously the long eyelashes of wire descended upon the perfect time-defying cheek. I peered to see a tear, but there was none. Yet there was something so heart-rending in the robot's statement of emotion that I could not laugh. For I knew she did not lie. Her creators must have been heartless. . .

"No, not heartless. Just called by greater loyalties than to my own synthetic soul. I understand what I am. I am not important as is life itself."

"Is that actually true. . .?"

"Sometimes I wonder. In my lonely contemplation of Time's slow drift past this forgotten spot, I wonder about many things, but how can I know if I am thinking or only repeating implanted reactions of my electronic metal brain?"

"To me you are vastly more important right now than any other on this planet except my Ceuina."

"You need me, but you do not love me?"

"You do not *need* love, do you?"

"Strangely, perhaps by reflection of constantly heard thoughts of the past that implanted themselves upon memory, weirdly and awfully I need all the things that are human! Yet nothing alive today could solve the enigmas of my needs."

"You're right there. . ."

THETHE incredible, unavoidable conversation went on, her mind as one within my own, seeing all I was and thought, answering and hearing and performing with her complex faculties many functional problems of thought beyond my understanding.

"If you could help these Tuons, I am sure they would give to you such gratitude, such care, such understanding of your

needs as exist nowhere else for you under this sun!"

"So you know what the sun is, what it causes in man?"

"I know what it is . . . age and ugliness and degeneration. If only I could tell all men that they cannot live until they find a better thing than sunlight to dwell beneath . . ."

"Why *don't* you tell them?"

"They do not listen. I am not authorized by sheepskins . . ."

"Sheepskins? Strange . . ."

"Strange, but true, Eltona."

"Yes, you have my name aright. I was as one of the family. A great family they were . . ."

From her mind, dwelling on the far past I received a picture of a life beyond imagination in splendor and pleasure and achievement. Of glories and honors and explorations and inventions connected with this family that had built this mighty home . . .

"Within you, Steel from another planet, is a something I would serve. I realize as well as you do that my masters are never to return."

"It is most probable that they were unable."

"It is most probable that their duties to their race flung them into space too far to return before the deluge. I lived through the deluge, and I wept. Even I, wept!"

Somehow, ludicrous as it sounds, it was not so. Her sorrow was as real, and vastly more intense to the sensing on my mind, than a living being. But who are we to say what life is or that life itself did not dwell in that robot? *

On and on went our locked minds, my own trailing her energetic tireless thought somewhat as a small boy who finds he has hooked his sled to a Greyhound bus instead of the milk wagon he had intended. Incongruously she condescended to me, incongruously I found myself in the same po-

* George W. Crile's "Bipolar Theory of Living Processes" holds that:

The life-organism as a whole is a bipolar electric mechanism bearing the pattern of the unit cells and the unit cells are constructed on the pattern of the atom.

The normal and the pathological phenomena of man and animals can be interpreted in electrical terms.

The application of electricity to the muscles of the glands, or to their nerve supply will cause them

sition as my primitive captors, worshipping the infinite art within her mighty being. Robot to the Elder race, to me she was as a goddess.

She questioned me about Etidorpha, her curious thoughts reaching again and again to search me for details. In the end she noticed my mind relating herself to the inactive robots I had seen lying like rubbish about the labyrinths where the Nameless race had their soft, ineffectual but surprisingly intense life.

"Other robots . . ." Her eyes flashed with electric energy, her head turned those exquisite synthetic eyeballs upon me.

"Yes, there are some there, but they are inactive. The Nameless explains they are taboo. . ."

"The fools. Their forefathers probably feared them, knew not how to utilize us. . ."

"Well, I for one would certainly like to utilize yourself!"

I would have sworn it was a coquettish glance she flung me, saying: "Your Ceuina will be jealous if I accompany you. . ."

"Yes, but she will be alive, and I love her. You know the pain of unrequited love, of separation. You know these agonies. Spare me. . ."

If only I could create just the right patterns of thought that would enlist those mechanical reactions of hers, would cause her to arise from that throne she had guarded for her masters for so many forgotten centuries, if . . .

"I think, Steel! Do not fear, presently we will arise and set things aright in your world. It is perhaps time I threw off this tie that has bound me here and examine for myself what has happened to the upper world. But you must remember, I have been treated to exclude independent action, have to do such things in a round-about way. . .

"Vaguely I understand. You need a command from a master . . . and there is to perform their natural functions. This is a basic fact universally accepted by physiologists.

The difference between the living and the lifeless is a difference in the energy content of the molecules.

. . . Which so strikingly differentiates it (living) from the lifeless are due to the increase in the energy content of the molecules . . .

In fact, who are our scientists to say that life did not dwell in that robot? So far as our definitions cover the matter—she lived.—Author.

no master now on earth for you, nothing that fits this need for a mental ignition. . .

"Yourself, Steel. If I can place yourself mentally within my mind so that I can cause the reactions necessary, as if to serve my creator, my master, then, and only then, can I cause my body to act. That is the problem I ponder."

SEARCHING her intensely heard thoughts I saw a picture of herself, long, long ago, touching her lips to her master's hand as a sign of obedience, of robot equivalent to an oath of allegiance.

"If you kissed my hand, and thought those old thoughts over as you did it, perhaps then you can arise and go out and do what needs so much to be done?"

"We will try that."

She arose, and I placed myself upon the throne upon the dais. She bent upon one graceful knee, picked my hairy-backed hand up from the arm of the great throne, said:

"Loanve, Matra."

A strange light shone in her eyes now as she looked up at me, and I knew then that it was a noble and a good life that had paced these halls, even if it were not formed in exactly the patterns we call noble and good.

It lacked the sham we are so used to, I suppose.

"Let us go, Steel, mu matra."

I had won the allegiance of a super-mind from the far past!

CHAPTER VIII

. . . *Chandra's Temple, but within was none.*

Save a gray owl which fluttered from the shrine.

The Light of Asia

ELTONA, that amazing simulacrum of life of the far past, strode ahead of me. Tall, nearly eight-foot, I nevertheless knew from her heard thought that she was small compared to the beings she had served so long ago.

Out that passage we had traversed with the tiny torches of the sub-humans, now we passed in total darkness, my mind listening to Eltona's and knowing the way as innately as did she herself.

It is a strange thing to feel affection, to

owe gratitude and friendship, to feel a stimulation of physical attraction toward a robot! Stranger still to feel that she returns your affection.

Stranger still was to hear her musing of the men she had MARRIED during the endless stretch of time that had passed! Comparing me with them, and not too favorably! She made no effort to conceal these thoughts. In fact I knew that her essential honesty kept her thought-energy source on a high peak so that I would hear.

"You really MARRIED other men!"

"The time has been so long, and they insisted so desperately. I am very beautifully built. My master called me his masterpiece."

"They aged and died. . . ?"

"Yes, they aged and died, here in this forgotten castle of the Eltons of the ancient race. Here they remained with me, and I know they were far happier than a mortal woman could have made them."

Desperately my mind whirled to keep up with the speed of her electronic thought patterns. Desperately I summoned from the depths of my mind every correlating memory to understand such things. The old legends of the immortals—could they have been similar robots left behind because of the same catastrophe summoning the living masters to space, never to return? The legends of the marriages of mortals to immortals—could it have been similar instances of an immortal robot passing the stretches of dull time with the love of a human while they waited for the never-returning masters?

Eltona answered.

"I imagine the circumstances have been repeated many times in other homes of the Elder race on many planets. . . ."

"I don't understand. A man would want to marry you. . . ?"

A flame of something resembling mortification, of felt insult, or scorn, passed over her lovely mask of a face. The opening to the surface was just ahead, the rising sun told me that a night had passed, and Eltona stopped, as if too angry to go on with her plans.

"Do you think I could not wrest your love from this mortal woman you worship? Do you think any mortal could compete with the magnetic sex-electrics my mech can generate? I could pull your mind to mine till there was no escape. Shall I

demonstrate?"

"No, Eltona, please don't! I do not understand! I did not mean that you were not beautiful, or desirable, but I did not know that you thought of these things as did a living being."

"I am *alive*—but very differently alive. Among the ancient race who sired the lost race of humans long ago robots were known as a *superior* form of life. It was a mourned thing that robots could not bear young. *Robot* is a word you do not understand. It is a synthesized *life* supplied with the means for eternal self-support! Do you comprehend what the ancients built when they built a robot?"

"I have a glimmer, but it is a hard thing for my mind to accept."

"We are quite well equipped with emotions and other fleshly apparatus necessary to love. Our love was vied for in the ancient social life. A robot is not a thing easily created, but is born of a long growth period superintended by a superior scientist. We are born of protoplasm taken from the flesh of our creators, supplied with growth fluids and machinery to keep the growth fluids ever new and clean, ever charged with life energy.

"Yet you were a servant, an inferior?"

"Not a servant, as you think of it. I was a trusted employee, given a job to do—and I have fulfilled my trust. Better than the human body could, by far."

I thought of the endless centuries passing so slowly over her head. . .

WE HAD passed upward through the trees to the great platforms in the upper limbs where dwelt the race of tree dwellers.

Here Eltona stood over the piles of loot they had collected from the plane. With short, barking words she ordered them taken back to the wrecked ship.

Sullenly the little red and brown race of tree people complied with their goddess' angry orders. Silently, without that cheerful sinister cheeping and chittering talk the procession filed back toward the high roof of the forest where lay the Tuon lighter-than-air machine.

I followed the agile leaping body of Eltona as best I could across the green gulfs, swinging by the lianas, treading the platforms of lashed poles which supplemented the swinging vines wherever

needed, until we reached the upper reaches of the tree-city. There I was stymied, for the tree people were shinnying up the titanic limbs with all the suction-tread ability of tree-toads, Eltona flinging herself aloft by main strength, sinking her metal boned fingers into the wood and bark as if they were hooks made for the purpose. Myself was left behind, peering up at them fearfully. Eltona barked at the little people. They turned back, lashed me to a long vine, began to pull me up in easy stages.

Their anger or jealousy at my success in winning the regard of their goddess worked here to make them slyly drop the vine again and again. It would be caught by one of the lower ones, out of sheer stupidity, he not understanding that the act was premeditated.

Eltona after this had happened three times, caught up the last little red and brown man who had failed to retain his hold upon my life-line, turned him over her metal-boned knee and spanked him with a hand I knew was as a metal-filled rubber hose. He screamed like a child with agony. When she released him, he began to make his way painfully back down toward the tree-city below. I could not help laughing, but my own life was in the balance; another such attempt and his comrades would have caught on, would have failed to retain their hold upon the line.

Mountain-climbing is hazardous, but try the forests of Venus with such companions! For real peril, that climb was the tops for me. When we reached the precariously perched Tuon ship, I clambered in through the round door, lay down thankfully on the nearly level floor and offered a prayer to Etidorpha—a goddess I found my mind had adopted as its own.

Eltona, shouting stridently at the little men, replaced piece by piece every bit of the loot, fastened the engines back in their aluminum beds, went over the mechanisms as if she had been the inventor of the ship. Within short hours, before the sun had reached the meridian, the motors were humming. I said:

"The jets are bent. I will have to crawl back through the tail assembly, pound out the crushed places with a hammer."

"You will have to. I am too large for the passage. Go ahead, get the openings somewhere near even."

"Venus, you will hear from Eltona soon.

I am eager to take a hand in life again. Too long have I held aloof, sorrowing!"

I thought of the marriages "she had been reviewing.

"Sorrowing?" I said.

"Those marriages were sorrow. The race of man is fallen so far that they were but pity for a creature hopelessly ensnared by attraction I could not help emitting, and he could not help succumbing to. They were sorrow!"

I nearly understood what she meant. I had seen the vast painting of the life of the Elder world. I crawled back through the narrow tapering tail, began to beat out the crushed sides with a heavy hammer, I could not reach the jets until I had done this.

AS I worked, deafened by the clangor, the ship shifted, slid downward beneath, then lifted gently. Outside I heard the swish and crack of the great burned and burdened limbs upon which the ship had rested. I scrambled backward, thinking the ship had been dislodged by our movements, was falling.

Backing crablike. I turned on my knees, stared up into the muzzle of an antique dis-ray bulb.

⁶ Robot Marriages—One of the tales in the caves, from the past of that wonderland, is that in the early days there were many very wonderful and beautiful robots, so marvelously constructed that men married them in preference to real women! I have not got enough details on this to tell you whether this is a fulfillment of every man's dream—a perfect wife—who talks only when her voice is needed, sings only beautifully and perfectly, wants love only when yourself wants love and needs her cooperation, but it is true that once in the caves the marriage of men to these antique human-like robots did occur.

It is my personal opinion that many of the legends of fairies and genie are references to these various robots. Their behavior is often anything but human. Their desire to serve someone seems what would be built into such a robot: a desire to serve a master.

So Eltona speaks of her past marriages because such marriages *did* occur long ago in the caverns, *may* occur today in the newly opened portions which are entered only by the elect, the fortunate children of the ancient families who have kept the God Caverns' entrances to themselves and suppressed all the wisdom that man might have won from the relics of that superior race who built them. They themselves study little, do not want a more industrious people using the Elder science against them.—Author.

Behind the gaping mouth of the pistol was the hated scarlet and gold, the hideously young-old face, the lantern jaw and huge nose of one of Hecate's priests from Medieval Spain. I knew him. He threw some of the Medieval English these fellows speak upon occasion, their long life having given them time and opportunity to learn many tongues. The words spat scornfully:

"Ye thought ye had gotten well away from Nonur, eh? But, after the battle we missed your beloved face among the fallen. Some of our warriors then reported they had seen you whirled aloft by some devilish mysterious contrivance. Ingenious rascal, aren't ye, to be pulled out of a battle like that just in time to avoid being hurt?"

"So you traced the ship's flight! So what?"

"So back you go to Nonur, and mayhap to Yin Yan; who knows? Friendly creature, that Yin Yan. Personally, if I were as good-looking as Nonur I would have found a more attractive creature for a partner, but there's no accounting for some people's tastes . . . Whatever could have happened to these poor old Tuon women, here? They look a bit raveled about the edges—so very old. Poor hags! Tch, tch."

"Of course you wouldn't know how they got in that shape, would you?"

"Me! How should I know? Ridiculous question! I had nothing to do with spreading the ra . . . er, I mean I don't know what happened to them. Did they tell you what had occurred to so destroy their lovely faces, their lovely young bodies? Or were they too ill, poor things?"

"By God, Mazzini, if you had a hand in that crime, you shall die a death no man ever experienced before. I'll think of something properly to punish whoever did that to them."

"Silly, what could be biting your skull to make you so stupid. I'm sure I can't imagine what could have happened to them. And how do you intend to do anything about anything now? You are returning to Yin Yan."

The hideous face looked at me calculatingly from behind the thick, antique, square lenses.

"Did they say any others of their race were in that condition?"

It was my turn to think twice before I talked. I figured it was just as well not to let him know I knew anything for sure. I

said:

"Our conversation had just reached the point of what had happened to them when the twister seized us and wrecked this ship. What *did* cause their peculiar condition? They look as if they had been exposed to a ton of radium, or spent a lifetime in a radium mine, or something!"

"I am curious myself. Horrible thing, whatever it is. I understand they're using a radioactive sand on Earth, to spray over enemy cities. It kills everything it touches and the ground remains radioactive wherever it falls for some time—up to a year. It might have been something like that. . . ."

I knew he was gloating, knew quite well that the terrible new Earth weapon of radioactive sand had been used by Nonur's crew to put the Tuons out of the way. I did not let him know that I understood, for it would have given him pleasure to gloat over my sorrow at the loss of the whole race for whom I had the highest admiration and affection. My eyes kept searching the ship as he backed along the corridor toward the control room: what had become of my ally, Eltona? Had she escaped, was hiding from the sudden coming of the Hagmen? Whatever had happened to her, she was not to be seen on board that vessel now.

I said:

"The two Tuons were trying to understand why the plague had singled them out from all the other peoples of Venus. They appeared to think it was a plague of some kind, a disease. I do not believe they knew, but I had only a few words with them. So you think it was radioactive sand dropped from a great height upon the Tuon tree cities?"

"It could have been, Steel. What is the difference? Come along now. This ship is due for the swamp below, and you for a session with Nonur or Yin Yan. Soon you will join the race of Amazons with the other figures of ancient history. Why worry about things. It won't help you any!"

I FOLLOWED the gesturing pistol back to the open door in the side of the ship. There was no sign either of the little insect race or of Eltona, the magnificent robot. I inferred they had seen the approach of the Hagmen's plane and had scattered into hiding in the leaves and branches of the mighty trees beneath.

A long, dark-metalled craft was grappled

to the hull with magnetic cables pulled short. I stepped across the yard-wire gulf into the captor ship. As I slid through the opening, I stepped into the grinning midst of the crew of cutthroats. Many of them knew me, gloated openly over my downfall, repeated so frequently of late. I had lorded it over them when I was Hecate's favorite, to hell with me now.

The red robed creature led me back through the great ship to the cargo space. Two of the venomous crew lashed me there to an upright metal girder. I sat, bewildered, full of that dark despair which had come to me at the loss of Ceulna. I looked up through the dimness of the dark hold at the wrinkled pink-grey face of the Priest.

"Philip Mazzini, for the memory of the mighty Hecate whom we both served, willingly or unwillingly, tell me one thing."

He looked down at me enigmatically, as though to say: "Hecate is gone, and you are an enemy. Why should you ask favors of me, who never could have anything but hate for you and every other who does not live as I do upon the young life of other's children." But, after a long moment he said:

"I will answer a question, why not? You will not be alive for long."

"Where and when did Nonur acquire this thing called Yin Yan, or it acquire her? And why is it I never heard mention of it, privy to all of Hecate's councils as I was?"

I felt the ship lift gently, heard a muffled explosion far below, knew that the ship lying upon the tree tops had been destroyed with a bomb. Had the bomb destroyed my last hope, Eltona? My heart dropped. I looked up at Mazzini. My question seemed to have affected him strangely.

His face blanched, his manner changed subtly.

"That monster is one thing I hesitate to speak about. It is a fearful creature out of the past, or out of space, but at the time you were with us it had not been openly known by any of us. The Nameless race had kept Yin Yan a captive for a long period of time. It is supposed to be an enemy of some goddess they worship, whether she exists or not, named Etidorpha. I know little of the Nameless race. Nonur, after Hecate's death, began to push the Nameless people around, released the monster, tried to use its intelligence. As you say it is a question among us all. Did

Nonur acquire Yin Yan, or did Yin Yan acquire Nonur? Your guess is as good as mine, but if I had that tank to myself, I would blast it into kingdom-come in a trice. I do not envy you! Good-by."

He closed the metal door of the cargo compartment, locking it behind him. His heavy tread went off forward to the control chamber in the bow.

I lay in the darkness speculating on the meaning of such things as Yin Yan, and Etidorpha. Such things a man always hears of, and never puts faith in until face to face with them. Had the Nameless race, helped by Etidorpha, the grey luminous mist; or Yin Yan, the coiling tank of venomous evil, thinking life, behind the evil of Nonur, won the battle from which accident and two unfortunate creatures plucked me? Would I learn which had triumphed?

As I tried to think of these unthinkable creatures and what they meant to me, beside me something stirred, startling me into an exclamation.

"What is there?"

A LOW voice, womanly and alien, spoke several words in the tongue of the Red race. I had learned many of the words of the tongue from my red comrades in the pens of the gladiators. She said:

"Be not frightened. I am but a maiden of the Mamarlons, the red men. Tell me, what are these things of which you spoke to the beastly Red Robe?"

I answered her as best I could, after a moment in which my nerves quieted.

" . . . and who are you? A prisoner like myself of these Hagmen?"

I was in the garden, walking among the flowers, dreaming of love when the great battle between the hated aliens and the noble Nameless race took place. The earth opened, out poured the weaponed sleds of the aliens of the red robes, and one of them slowed, warriors leaped down and seized me. Later, when they were ordered into their flyers to pursue me, Philip Manzini, as you call him, saw me, ordered me taken along.

I knew what her fate would be, but my mind, still retaining its Hecate training, chose not to dwell upon the unpleasant aspects of her future.

The ship sped over the titanic green jungles, southward and southward, but the red girl and myself lay bound in the dark-

ness.

"How came you to be in Nicosthene, among the green marsh-men?"

"My father is the ruler of a city of the Mamarlon, called Hepsee. Years ago, long before I was born, the Seven Kings warred with the red race, and won the war. Ever since, the rulers of many Mamarlon city-states must send a daughter to Nicosthene as a hostage. It is a custom only, but it is obeyed still. I can only leave when a sister is sent to take my place. Always one of us must live in Nicosthene as a hostage. It is not unpleasant. The relations of the green men and the red are now very pleasant. But if war should come, that would change."

"I see. You are a princess in your own country. That is good. Nonur may hold you as a hostage too, instead of throwing you to her officers for their pleasure. Obey her, do not talk too much or be too horrified at her evil ways."

"I will try. But what I have heard is very frightening. What will become of you?"

"I cannot tell. It is probable that I will be killed, or sent again to the arena, or fed to Yin Yan—it is hard to say, except that it will not be pleasant."

I lay, wrapped again in despair, thinking of the papers containing the Dunder formulae still tucked in my belt pocket. Mantagna had been too confident of my ability when he entrusted them to me. Thinking too of what it was that had struck down the two Tuon Amazon women, whether it were true that the whole race of Amazons had been struck by the blight, as the two had intimated? At long last the ship grounded gently. Lights went on outside, the door opened, our bonds were removed from our feet.

With our wrists bound behind us, we were shoved along the titanic passage in semi-darkness, brought before Nonur.

The great crystal nest of force-focusing lenses shaped like a great reclining-chair, as Hecate had always used, now contained the more pleasant figure of Nonur. Her beauty was undeniable, a dark brunette, her skin was white as paper, her flesh soft and shapely, her limbs undeniably graceful and supple. But her deep emerald-lit blue eyes were pale and venomous, her lips were sated with past orgies of cruelty, her fingers twitched upon her sleek thighs like a cat

contemplating an approaching, unsuspecting mouse. The glittering, transparent mesh of her revealing gown was of the finest of the Elder fabrics, and she made a picture of extreme beauty, overlaid by a revulsion that has no connection with beauty, but is another thing. The beauty was a camouflage, an affectation of a vile kind, and the truth of the *thing* that she was all too apparent, too fearful. The bound girl beside me shuddered, pressed closer to me as if for human contact to warm away the cold chill brought by a sight of Nonur, successor to Hecate.

Her inhuman, mockingly mean voice, musical in a strange mechanical variance of pitch, exulted over my return.

"Even the impossible good fortune that attends you could not complete your escape."

Beside me Mazzini opened his grey lantern-jaw.

"We found him on a Tuon ship trying to repair the damage done by an equatorial twister. With him were two dead Tuon women!"

"Did the effects show? Describe their bodies."

Effects of what, I wondered? A now complete realization of what she meant came to me as Mazzini described the white hair and red sores that had been their most striking features.

"The radioactive sand does a job, then. We will manufacture another load for our next opposition!"

"I will attend to it!" Mazzini was glad to find an excuse to leave her presence before her ill-nature had found a cause to find a fault in him. I knew the feeling with which his steps hastened out. I had had the same taste to leave such dominant evil ones before, myself.

NONUR turned again to me with a gloating look dripping on her face. Her mouth was wet with lust for the pleasure she would have with me.

"So you thought to flee and bring down the Tuons upon me. You have seen the effects of my work upon their bodies. Does it make you more hopeful, to know what my hand has done to destroy the Tuon nation? Does it make you confident of my eventual destruction to know that I have destroyed the whole race of Tuon Amazons, rotted away their vaunted beauty, made of

them all but tottering hags, rotten with radioactivity? Hah, you think to escape me!"

"You must feel very proud." I was on my toes, seeking vainly for some way to turn her from her thought path. With such as her, their minds are unpredictable. She might throw me in a dungeon, forget me for years; or if her lusts dictated, she might begin a torture for me that would last for weeks before I died. I much preferred the dungeon, hoped to lead her thought away from myself.

"Do not try to flatter me. You could cozen Hecate, fool her, betray her to her enemies, but you will not do that with me!"

"Nonur, the night we fought the Tuons from your Earth caverns, you were reported dead, if I remember right. Yet here you are alive. How did you ever escape?"

"I am pleased that you ask. Knowing them, the Tuons and Hecate, I feigned death. Hecate fled through a sea-passage toward the depths; the Tuons pursued. I was left behind with the dead and dying. I made off, in a small Xoncar, in the opposite direction. It was a close thing, that night. What became of you? I heard later that the Hag had left you behind."

"She did. I just walked up the steps and out into the city above. Simple?"

"Simple, yes. And you did not get back in until the Sea People looked you up and drafted you for a spy. I understand, now."

"I have long wondered what happened to you that night."

As I looked at her, she smiled that venomous, lovely smile of hers, touched me with one of the great beams that sprang from the base of the great crystal nest at her touch, rays of many varied kinds. This one was of purest pain, a ray I am sure the Elder race never built, but something since conceived and inserted within the Elder mech. I howled. A man cannot help it when such a flood of violence, like being torn by many hooks, pours over one's body.

She smiled, said: "Remember the girl on the cross, the first time we met?"

"I remember!" I said savagely. "A murderer without a cause but cruelty."

"For yours I will have a cause—to keep myself from being betrayed as you betrayed the mighty Hecate."

In my belt the papers of the Dunder formulas were burning holes through my

consciousness, for Mantagna had warned me they *must not* fall into evil hands or they would result in vast harm, in tremendous power for evil. I had to keep this thought from Nonur's telaug beam, still upon me, sometimes shifting to peer at the mind of the young red princess, but always coming back to the study of myself. What she was thinking, what she really intended to do with me, I could not imagine, but I knew it would be unwanted.

"What did you think of my friend Yin Yan?" Nonur's eyes were peering at me with a weird exultation, waiting for my thoughts of the creature to form in my mind, and I knew now that she was seeking the one thing I dreaded most, seeking my greatest fear in my mind—for when she spoke the name, I knew what that fear was, all at once: that I should become one of those captive, living memories within the unrolling memory folds that were his mind, that I should live on as a part of that weird composite creature, made up of the living minds of all the creatures it had ever absorbed in its unguessable life.

I calmed my jittery thought, asked:

"Where did such a creature originate, Nonur? I had never imagined life could take such a form and be intelligent!"

"Yin Yan is a native of the Venusian seas, an ancient race once powerful. He is the last known member of that race. He was captured centuries ago by the Nameless, imprisoned here in his tank as a specimen to study. Now he plans to make a similar study of the whole Nameless race. They will live, in Yin Yan! Ha, ha, ha! Fitting?"

"It is asked among your men whether you acquired Yin Yan, or he acquired you? Your own fate, then, is not much different than the fate of the Nameless race will be!"

"You insolent fool! Things like that are not said in my hearing! You make it hard to be lenient, if I had such an intention."

"If I was serving Hecate, and heard such speech, I would have reported it to her in just that way."

"You are not serving Hecate, and you will not live long enough to class yourself among my followers."

"You cannot decide what to do with me. You have to ask Yin Yan's opinion upon everything, and then do as he says! Your dependence upon that slimy mind becomes greater every day. Soon you will be known

as the thing of Yin Yan, instead of the other way around."

"You seek to anger and confuse me. But you will not succeed. We will go to Yin Yan, see what he advises be done with you, and then we will do as I please. It pleases me to pretend that Yin Yan is a power here, for it makes the blacks afraid of me, makes many primitives stand in awe of the power of Yin Yan. When he has served his purpose, there will be an end of him. He knows that!"

MY THEORY that, consciously or unconsciously, Nonur was the servant of Yin Yan was fully borne out by her actions. She arose, ordered the guards to lead us ahead of her, followed us into the great many-doored chamber where the vast tank of liquid bore within its crystal walls the twining mass of weird, alien life that was Yin Yan.

The thing in that tank coiled and twined, rolled up into a curious volute spiral, unrolled into many-pierced lacy curtains of finest gauzy writhings, bunched again into a dense mass of strangely peering, probing sentience—and Nonur, the guards in their Spanish mail, carrying the antique ray rifles on the ready, and the red princess of Hepsee and myself, with my manacled hands, stood in a line and watched the weird thing. Awesome, alien, from the folds of him peered now and again the thin, one-dimensional faces of people, like pictures printed on living paper, yet retaining life within that awful life that was Yin Yan. I shuddered uncontrollably, the Red Princess trembled steadily with revulsion as she gazed with eyes she could not tear from the writhing body and weird, changing face that seemed its head. Nonur spoke, almost reverently, muted the venomous pride in her voice, muted the dominating evil of her.

"Mighty Yin Yan, I bring two prisoners for you to judge. What shall be done?"

CHAPTER IX

Function and substance as the snake's egg hatched

Takes scale and fang; as feathered reed-seeds flight;

Red roams the unpurg'd fragment of him, driven

On winds of plague and blight.

Gautama Arnold

YIN YAN! That primordial thing, whether spawned in the beginning of time for this planet Venus, whether a result of the Nameless scientists' fluids in which he was immersed in his tank, whether an intelligent being in the strictest sense of the word, or just a kind of sum-total of the many minds which his peculiar nature had kept alive within his body—whatever it was that imbued his life with such weird, awful, awe-inspiring character, he was the mightiest living creature I had yet encountered in this world where all the laws of nature as I had learned them on Earth were violated! He, I do believe, was the oldest living thing on Venus, excepting Etidorpha and perhaps the curious robot-goddess Eltona, though I could not succeed in thinking of her as living.

My mind refused both Etidorpha and Eltona. They were beyond the grasp of my concept. I could see them, hear them, know they lived and still refuse them mentally as impossibilities somehow animated. The sentient, sinister, selfish, utterly repellent spirit that lived and writhed within Yin Yan's tank, my mind accepted—disgusted, revolted, but unable to refuse his reality. Yin Yan, the monster whose shape defied classification, protean composite of snake and hydra and octopus and jellyfish, yet an intelligence, planning, thinking age-old thoughts of power and dominance over other lives.

Yin Yan spoke to us with a great thought voice that shuddered and vibrated in our minds with an impact that was frightening. I could understand that men with little pride could grovel before this thing, beseeching mercy.

"Mortals, worms, ephemerae crawling under this ancient sun—you disturb Yin Yan's meditations and ask him to dispose of your futures. Think you Yin Yan cares what you do with these creatures of no soul and less mind? Away with them and with you, Nonur of the fearful soul. What is it I read in you that frightens you? Is it Yin Yan?"

"It is that I fear attack from the Sea People. This man before you has attempted escape, gotten as far as the hot belt, where we recaptured him. I fear he may have gotten word off in some way to that race we fear most of all."

"The Sea People have not been informed, I read that in him plainly. I also warn you

to rid yourself of him before he destroys you. He is a man marked by fate. He bears luck in his hands as other men bear a sword: dangerously. His courage, his tenacity, his ability are markedly superior. I would not delay. He is an enemy to get rid of, or a friend to cherish."

"He was no friend to Hecate!"

"Hecate found him amusing. She was not one to care whether a servant were friendly or not. Toss the man in the tank. I will enwrap him in an immortal shroud. He will live forever, serving my mind with his memories. His will will become a mote within my will. Give him to me!"

"And the maid of Mamarl, what of her?"

"Let her serve me. She is a mild creature; I can control her to my wants with a glance."

Hopelessly I glanced around. A dozen of the heavy-bodied blacks of the guard, which I had always seen posted here by the score, were approaching me. I knew that a word from Nonur would precipitate me into that nutrient fluid which supported the life of Yin Yan. Desperately I wrenched at the bonds about my wrists. My strength again served me well. The ropes gave, parted strand by strand as I darted my glance from one to the other of the nearing warriors. The instant I felt I had my hands free, I sprang to Nonur's side, pulled the short dagger from the belt of the guard beside her. With the same driving motion I swung her over my shoulder, her head dangling in front of me, waist high. The sharp blade I pressed against the pulsing side of her throat, a thin thread of scarlet marked the pressure. "The first hand to touch me kills Nonur!" I shouted, and without even pausing, kept in motion toward the greater of the many doorways with which this room had been provided.

THE black faces of the guard spelled confusion. They stood motionless and puzzled while I sprang through the great door, raced down the hall to the elevator up which we had come the day of the revolt of the gladiators.

The guard posted before the elevator door had not time to analyze the situation well enough to figure it necessary to leave me alone. He sprang for me, tugging at his weapon. I shouted at him.

"Stand back, or Nonur dies!" He grinned at me in a sinister way; I could not help

"The first hand to touch me kills Nonur,"
I shouted, and without pausing kept on



but know he meant: "You fool, do you think that is a threat. I would be pleased."

I blocked his blade with Nonur's body. The point sank in her soft flesh. She screamed. The moment gave me time to sink my own dagger into his throat in a heavy, slashing blow. He dropped. I retrieved his sword from the floor, sprang into the elevator, spun the controls. Nonur's body I flung to the floor like a sack.

The great cage dropped, the ancient machinery screamed with the unoiled friction. Little of the old mech is properly cared for, but it is so superbly built that it does not cease to function. Within seconds I shot the brake wheel around again. The cage ground to a halt, the gears clanging in the wall teeth like bronze gongs. I leaped out, carrying the body of Nonur again across my shoulders. She was not badly wounded, but she knew better than to make a move that would cause me to kill her. Her lips snarled, her teeth gritted, her anger consumed her, as she groaned:

"Not Yin Yan shall have you. Your death will be my own pleasure now. And you will not die as that girl on the cross; you will last for a time such as you did not believe. A stretch of painful time will contain your mind till there is no power to feel pain!"

"Yah, Nonur! You are full of insane ideas, and to me you are ugly as the Hag herself."

Straight to the pens I went.

"Nonur, order these guards to release the prisoners or I will toss you in among them!"

Nonur shot one glance into the pens seething with the scarred gladiators, some of whom were survivors of many battles in the arena and knew this Hell-hole under Nicosthene and the place Nonur held in it as well as remembered myself. Along all the ancient iron bars their bodies pressed. They set up a continual shout:

"Give her to us, Steel. Give her to us—"

Whether I could have done so had not Nonur ordered them released I don't know—but she was not taking any chances. Whether she thought I had retained a key from my former escape or whatever was in her mind, she shouted at the guards to do as I commanded.

In short minutes the tunnels under the arena swarmed with the angry, scarred multitude; the best fighting men on Venus, and I am sure there were a good thousand

of them. Speedily they passed out arms from the arena's stores, began to press toward the upper borings, looking for more potent weapons.

From the guards about, a half score of men, we took the ray rifles. The guards we pushed into the pens—locked the doors.

"We take the same path as before. Today we have a hostage. I will go before you with the witch held where all can see her."

A tall green warrior of the marsh-men pressed forward, placed himself at my side.

"Steel, I wondered what your fate. Then I heard you led a revolt, and how you were taken away in the night. Now you are back and with a hostage. That is good! They cannot ray us while you hold Nonur at sword's point."

"Donar!"

Joy swept over me, was drowned in my anxiety to make good this desperate last effort for life. "Guide us, Donar, you know these caves better than we."

"Do you want escape, or do you want battle and death? I think the former will not avoid the latter, so why bother?"

"I was going to attack the room where Yin Yan lies in his tank. I know no other passages, no other thing to do!"

Even as Donar pondered, and as I wondered just what his knowledge of this place might consist of, another figure appeared from above us, came floating down a shaft which lay empty and gaping where once had been a vertical car-line. The cables hung ripped and broken. It was evident that once the car had plunged past, ripping and breaking the very rocks of the shaft in its fall. Down into our midst the figure floated, reminding me of the painting called "Apotheosis of Pittsburgh," on earth. It was a bad painting, I had thought then. Now, seeing this black-armored figure and strange silver-spiraled rod, descending by some means unknown to me, I decided I had been wrong. It was a good painting. It merely had lacked the explanation of levitation. In his hand he bore an intricately wired, glowing little box, and I realized it was some type of levitator he had rummaged out of the wreckage in his wanderings and set in operation.

"Montagna!" I called to him.

HE WALKED toward me, lifting at each step off the floor.

"Steel, what have you got into now?"

I turned Nonur's face toward him. He paled a trifle, though on his pallid intellectual features I could not be sure that he was ruffled at all. He said:

"My dear Chieftainess. Your posture, if unbecoming, is at least appropriate. I have long wished for this moment."

He let one hand fly, and the fine metal mesh of his ray-resistant glove must have stung her buttock, for she let out an audible "ouch."

"I have had a few moments for parley with those other vampiric entities known as Priests of the Hagmen. All of them are thoroughly sickened with this Nonur and her subservience to the monster, Yin Yan. We have decided to dispense with you, Nonur." He gave her rather prominent backside upon my shoulder several more painful whacks, said:

"And I don't care what you do with your burden, nor what you do with yourselves. I have obtained you that much leeway. You can march off into the caverns in any direction. You will find no enemies unless you make them. You can go upward to the city of Nicosthene, downward to your friends the Nameless. I have obtained for you that much, and for you others, the same is true because many of you have fought bravely and well. We Hagmen have our generous moments."

I looked at him, stupefied.

"You don't want Nonur! My hostage, then is a useless burden? You know, I suspected this when I selected her and hoisted her to my shoulder, but I had no choice. Is there any of you would have served as a hostage?"

"None. We are not in love with each other, you know."

"You leave us little choice. We just . . . walk off, get ourselves out of your way . . . that is all?"

"That is all. I suspect I myself will be the next leader of this little band of immortals, Steel. Want to throw in with me?"

"Since the death of the Tuons, your position is . . . different."

"It has had no effect upon me. Why should it?"

I realized there would be by now many rays listening to us, even if none were offering to harm us. I know that the men who had thrown their weight to his strength would not approve of any such alliance as he had suggested secretly existed between

himself and the Tuon intelligence corps. Vaguely I wondered if the little skull-mech had been inserted in his head that had nearly caused my death under Hecate.

"We were just about to launch ourselves in an attack upon the chamber where Yin Yan waits within his tank. It was suicidal, but we knew not what else. . . .

Suddenly the real truth of this man's behavior dawned upon me, for down upon us from above flashed one instant of flaming sheets of lightning through the suddenly transparent rock. I knew now he had been delaying us for minutes while certain apparatus above us was brought into play by Nonur's henchmen. Our little moment of power was destroyed by our dallying to speak with the "knight" in the suit of delicately-decorated ancient ray-flex armor.

The weird rod in his hand had flashed into action with the advent of the power ray deluging us. As my mind blanked out, I saw that it was throwing great pulses of a cold light in waves of protection about the figure of Montagna. Everywhere about me my gladiators were falling unconscious, myself was tottering, while he smiled, unmoved and unaffected, into my failing eyes.

My last thought was that this subtle cold-faced wretch was Nonur's lover. That was the only explanation of the whacks he had had the effrontery to give her. It explained his presence in Hecate's counsels, too. For where else would he be most valuable to Nonur? And it had been him who had brought Ceulna into this place. . . .

I CAME to my senses again. In an instant I was praying that I might resume the peaceful pastime of being unconscious. For I was suspended head downward, and the ropes cut my ankles painfully. But it was not that slight pain that bothered me. Directly beneath me was the great writhing mass of twisting folds that were Yin Yan's body. His great eyes, full of wailing, lost entities, stared up at me; his tentacles, writhing upward slowly to grasp me. I stared into his eyes, and I could hear faintly a scream—Ceulna's!

Her face came into my vision, just outside the tank. I grinned, somehow, even then; a man cannot help grinning at Ceulna.

"Don't worry, Ceulna. You'll get a better one where I came from."

She only wept heartbreakingly, stretch-

Directly beneath me was the great writhing mass of twisting folds that were Yin Yan's tentacular body—soft and evil





ing her arms out in a vain effort to reach me. The rope lowered with a little jerk—one inch. Nonur laughed, outside my range of vision.

"Pretty, close-up, isn't he, Steel?"

"At that, he is better looking than your own flabby, pink self, Nonur. How is your friend, Montagna?"

Montagna's voice answered:

"Don't worry about the dunder plans, Steel. There is no Tuon Amazon race to deliver them to, and the plans themselves were phony."

"Well, it seems a lot of trouble for nothing."

"We wanted to provoke a move from the Nameless people. We learned a great deal from that bit of hocus-pocus."

I laughed. For at the wall behind Ceuilna, where I could just make out Montagna and Nonur standing by a windlass to which my heel rope was attached, a grey mist swam, spun within the rock, and from it little grey streamers, glowing softly with angry vitality, reached and curled. Etidorpha was taking a hand!

Now, if that was illusion, I would die. If that grey, moving majesty of her misty body was strictly imagination, I would die. If there were such creatures as ethereal spirits, if such creatures could exist and pass through solid matter, if a tenuous so slight as to fly through solid rock as a fish through water could still possess a sensate, organized mentality, could possess the strength to affect matter, to move objects, to kill in one way or another, then Etidorpha was there behind them, waiting, reaching, spinning her weird body into greater solidity to reach and kill them with her faint misty arms. I would know, or I would die unknowing.

Montagna's low, penetrating, cultured voice was saying:

"You see, Steel, I need young blood to live. And only evil and the ways of evil can give me that life I crave."

"I understand fully, Montagna. You lack the courage to die for the sake of hundreds of children—of thousands. How many did it take to keep Hecate alive?"

Even as Montagna pondered my words calling him a coward, even as he raised his head to answer, a coil of that sentient grey mist wound itself about Nonur's throat. I strained my head back to watch. They were just in range of my vision.

"Ah . . . ! Nonur's scream was gurgle, gasp and surprise, was swiftly pain and terror. Montagna swung, saw the spinning, weird grey mist that was Etidorpha, struck at it with the peculiar silver-wound rod in his hand. The rod sparkled, threw a cascade of flying globules of reddish opacessences over him, burst into flame. He dropped it, cried out with pain. Whatever Etidorpha was, she was power and energy, and that odd, ancient weapon of his was useless against her. Nonur screamed again, a muffled, despairing sound.

Below my face the tank of fluid boiled with the angry coiling of Yin Yan. His great octopoid eyes rolled, he raised himself upon his score of tentacles peered at the scene. And there was fear in his thought, intense and vital and energetic. The many convoluted wet folds of him boiled and twisted upward, his tentacles streamed over the great crystal edge of the tank. Yin Yan was going to the defense of his servant!

His thought, so close was I to the motion, to the writhing, pouring, twisting sliminess of him that it seemed I was a part of him, the tremendous mental energies of his excited, desperate effort made the thought louder than my own.

"She, the mist goddess of the depths of the rock, has come from her hiding! She has struck mine . . . Nonur. She defies me, she will slay me next. Perhaps if I draw her away from Nonur the woman will turn a power ray upon the unsubstantial mystery that is her body and dissipate it like the living steam it is . . ."

YIN YAN was out of the tank, was flopping, stretching; pseudopods of him reached and drew, tentacles formed and reached for the grey coils that throttled Nonur. Montagna sprang back from the fearful monster, his hands spread against the wall in trembling fear that he could retreat from the scene of this battle no further.

The reaching, wet tentacles of formless, motile, many-vacuolated ooze touched the grey coils of Etidorpha, touched and seemed to suck at the energy that moved the mist. For an instant the slimy mass recoiled from the contact, but desperately it returned, and under the suction the greyness turned paler, was drawn further and further away from the struggling, white-faced, vampire-queen.

Now began the strangest battle ever witnessed on two planets. Steadily Yin Yan drew the tenuous strength of Etidorpha into himself, and as steadily more and more of her flowed from the rock. Greater and greater grew the masses of spinning, faintly luminous, sentient mist in the vaulted chamber. The vile stench that was Yin Yan's pervaded the air, writhing and flopping. The many weird folds of indescribable complexity reached and sucked and drew upon that grey, rock-borne mist, and now Nonur was free of the throttling energy that had choked her! Etidorpha was too busy subduing the absorptive Yin Yan. Whatever he was, he was also able to take in the weird soul-stuff of which she was made, able to absorb and rule parts of her as he had absorbed and dominated the minds of the animals and men he had eaten in the past.

Nonur dashed from the chamber, and within seconds the great rays flashed into the hall of Yin Yan and swept, searching for the core of the life of Etidorpha to burn it into non-existence.

CHAPTER X

The mind is a model in miniature of the Universe.

And just as infinite if you WILL awareness.

Eltona of Venus

NONUR had reached her crystal nest, with its complex instrument board of variant ray-controls. Among them were the terrible dis-rays, dis-sociator rays, shorter and pain-rays, levitator and pressure rays, solvent rays which take up atom by atom, electron by electron, any matter in their path, stim rays of infinite complexity and divine beauty. Swinging by my feet, I jerked my body in an attempt to cause an arc of swing that would let Ceulna reach me where she stood beside the tank. For I believed that within minutes Nonur would have succeeded in destroying Etidorpha, and that Yin Yan would return to his tank.

The bulk of Yin Yan, vast and flopping, and rotund or flattened as he changed in his movements, had Montagna pinned within a corner of the chamber. He shrank against the wall, forced against his will to a close-up observation of the battle of Titans.

Ceulna left the side of the tank, ran to the wall, ducking low to avoid the sweeping beams from Nonur's frantic hands upon her ray controls, reached up to the pulleys through which my suspending rope passed. I wondered how many times those pulleys had been used for just that purpose. I wondered why Nonur had not kept her promise to see to my demise in her own inimitable way. I swung back and forth, struggling and at the same time trying to see what the grey mist of Etidorpha was accomplishing against the terrific strength of the ancient beast of the primal seas of Venus—Yin Yan.

Yin Yan had sucked in, had drawn near half of the vast whirling force, the grey mist-globe that was Etidorpha, into his body. But he did not seem to be enjoying the effect of his absorption, was slowing down in his amorphous, jerking and twisting motion that accompanied his magnetic or psychic effort to encompass the weird force-body of the strange Elder-creature, Etidorpha.

At the remainder Nonur was flinging her battle rays in a savage effort to burn away forever the thing that had nearly destroyed her. The wall where Etidorpha had emerged, in which part of her weird body was still intermingled with the rock, was red-hot and melting under the shifting, spark-throwing impact of Nonur's compound destructive rays.

As my struggles nearly ceased in the unavoidable fascination of the utterly alien, incomprehensible thaumaturgy of the conflict of astral, of spiritual force with the abysmal negative vitality of Yin Yan, the rope holding me suddenly gave way. I plunged into the fetid, vile-smelling nutrient bath that was Yin Yan's nest.

Ceulna, her poor subjugated self realizing mental freedom for the time her masters were busy with the battling Titans, had managed to release the rope that held me waiting for Yin Yan's maw.

I swam, gasping, to the slimy surface of the ichor, splashed to the side of the tank. With my feet still bound, I could not reach the upper rim of the plastic tank.

I swam back and forth, trying to see through the wet and cloudy substance whether my protector had won the battle or whether Yin Yan had finally absorbed and subdued the peculiar tenuous substance that was the body of Etidorpha.

A section of the rope dropped over the tank edge upon my head. I seized it, went hand over hand up the tank side and fell out upon the polished floor, dripping and exhausted.

As I looked on the terrible conflict with the helpless eyes of a hashish eater, Ceulna bent with her clever long fingers busy at the knots about my feet.

Yet we both knew that unless Etidorpha won and destroyed those about Yin Yan as well as the monster, there was no hope of our escape from the range of the rays. Yet we tried, for such is man: he attempts the impossible and sometimes finds it is possible.

Still the vast repellent writhings of Yin Yan went on and on, still the grey force of Etidorpha whirled, flung out faint luminosities. The tendrils of mist shot through and through the slimy forms of Yin Yan's complex center body, whirled in and out, seeming caught in a vortex of magnetic attraction. And no man could say who was stronger, or whether it were possible that the strange being that was from an Elder world, Etidorpha, could be destroyed by any weapon or by any beast.

Nonur's steady, slowly-shifting rays burned and blazed through the wall in which part of Etidorpha still clung as to an anchor, and whether or not she was decreasing under the terrible destructive forces of the rays, I could not tell.

My feet were free, and Ceulna and I crouched by the great tank, peering in hypnotic fascination at the struggle of life-forms from a past beyond our understanding.

QUITE simply, her slow goddess-graceful pace as subtly mechanical, as measured as the tick of some wondrous clock, Eltona walked into the scene of conflict, stood peering not six feet from the heaving terrible sides of Yin Yan. Not a flicker of surprise showed on the lovely mask of her face as my own mouth dropped open in amazement at her entrance. Her voice, more beautiful than a human's could be, in slow and stately sounds accompanying her easily heard thought, asked:

"Mistress of the dear past days, Etidorpha, command me, Eltona, Elder-ro of Eltona!"

From the slow-whirling mist, from out of the subtle glow of her center, came Eti-

dorpha's thought:

"Use combination 313. The force field will dissipate the carcase if you enter his flesh strongly."

Eltona, her eyes rapt suddenly with a glow of more than human emotion, stood for a second, then over her tall, too-graceful body came a vibrance—a gleaming, flashing iridescence of deadly force. As it appeared she stepped once, twice, was against the vast heaving, scaly, mossed sides of the monster. With her metal hands she began tearing great chunks out of the fleshy side.

Yin Yan screamed, whirled heavily, struck at her with his several wide-open jaws, the great eyes of him wild and rolling and berserk with sudden pain. Calmly she thrust one arm into one pair of jaws. The great saw teeth clashed on the metal; bright scratches showed through the thin fleshy covering. With her hands she was clutching, tearing the soft inside parts of his throat. The monster hissed, like a steam escape valve, blood poured from his mouth. He reared back, upright the whole writhing mass of him, his many tentacles wrapped about Eltona with an effect as of slime from a sea of the pit tossed around a lovely God-statue. He picked up the too-lovely form, and with one furious exulting motion flung her across the wide vaulted chamber. Her body struck the farther rock of the walls with a deafening sound, sparks shot from Eltona's eyes and arms and fingers. She fell to the floor with a metallic crash, lay still, motionless! I suppressed a sob. To have hope so suddenly presented, so terribly taken away. I had been in love with that robot as a man loves a divine masterpiece of art, and as a man somehow worships anything connected with divinity. Something as mighty as our concept of a God had created that body, put that mind within Eltona. I had seen an angel slain. I sobbed openly.

I turned my eyes away from the still lovely, broken body of Eltona, whom in the short time I had known her had assumed a kind of invincible tower of strength stature in my eyes.

I looked back to the again-enwrapped forms of the Titans, lit by the fires of Nonur's madly burning rays, ripping at the rocks about Etidorpha with great gouts of penetrative fire.

And now through the walls came many

flashing lances of pale green power, the penetrative view rays of some new force—either Nonur's people peering over their rays to see the battle, or some approaching fleet spotting a target! It could be either, I would not know till battle was joined.

The only hope I had was that it was some power summoned by Eltona.

ELTONA had been amused in her contact with my mind, had searched it rather thoroughly. Where *had* she been since I had crawled into the tail of that wrecked Tuon air-ship? Could she have summoned the Sea People. Or had she reached the dying Tuon cities, brought the poor radioactive bodies of the Tuons out in one last attempt to wipe out the scourge of the Hagmen?

Whatever was outside behind those pale, searching view rays, Montagna found the desperation needed to scramble over the vast, retching, deadly mass of tentacles and scaly complex body of the monster, race toward the door by which Nonur had fled. He passed within feet of Ceuulna and myself.

I shouted: "Montagna!" and as his feet paused for the slightest instant, I flung myself after him in a flying tackle, got one leg, whirled across the room with Montagna tugging desperately to free himself.

In my mind was still a doubt of his essential villainy. I had played a double part myself in this game in the past, knew how utterly impossible it became to decide what is best, which side to support openly, for the mind in ray-telepath work is so open to observation that the part of a double-spy becomes an inconceivable intricacy of false thought. One must delude oneself to make such an act convincing telepathically.

As we struggled, I heard a hiss overhead, saw that Nonur had flung a bolt at myself, that the green rays had caught her red-flame ray on a sudden spear of darkness. My heart leaped. I had friends outside, and I knew they were coming in as fast as dis and pressure rays would smash a way, as fast as levitators would throw aside the debris of their entry.

Getting a good grip on Montagna's wiry, struggling body, I held him aloft, said softly:

"Speak your piece, or I'll break your neck."

"I have told you the truth, why ask me again? You should know what it is to play

this part! The techs outside will want me alive in any case."

I lowered him, held him in a bear-hug while Ceuulna brought the rope so recently about my own limbs and we lashed his arms and legs with many turns, lay him against the wall. We turned to take a look at Yin Yan and his antagonist, the mysterious mist of Etidorpha.

Yin Yan was massively turning, his great tentacles lifting, pulling his vast weight back toward his tank. I could not know if he were wounded to death; if he had absorbed the force body of the Elder spirit, or if he was only exhausted from such a long period out of his necessary fluid. I stood, watching him make his cumbersome, weary way back, watched him climb slowly back into his great tank.

There was no trace of the penetrating, vitally stimulating, grey moving mist of Etidorpha. Was she inside Yin Yan? I looked at him carefully, but could not tell. I had missed the last moments of the mightiest, the most strange battle I had ever witnessed.

Nonur's flaming ray spears had left the great hall of Yin Yan, and Ceuulna and I were alone for the first time in—I could not think how long. It seemed years since we had taken off from Merondeep, the Mer people's capital. On a honeymoon, we had thought!

I took her in my arms, and for a moment forgot the battle I knew was flaming somewhere about us. Far off I could hear the hiss and sudden sweeping sound of the flung rays swinging through the rock, hear the soft, slurring sound of the shorter beams swinging in defense, hear the dis-flames blasting somewhere at the stubborn rock to make a passage. But here for a moment was peace, and Ceuulna, her eyes clearer, looking up at me with almost the old light again in her eyes. Soon, I knew, away from evil ray cuts, the connecting nerves of her mind would heal, she would be again my intensely alive, witty, sarcastic, loving Ceuulna.

Even as our lips met, a low sound made me whirl. But there was nothing, until my eyes fell on the still, too-lovely form of the giant Eltona. Her eyes were open, staring strangely and sadly at me.

Gently I released Ceuulna, went and bent over the lovely mask of her face. Eltona, robot, perhaps, but a mind of vast power

from a time when men were gods. Her eyes were soft and more womanly than I recalled. She murmured—or did she only think, so that I heard:

"Your beloved, that child?"

"She is not a child, she has nearly as many years as myself!"

"She is so small, but I forget that men and women are small nowadays. The years, oh, the years that take you all away so quickly and leave me wretched and alone to keep my vigil. Ah, Steel, if only you had not come to Eltonal."

"I do not understand." But I did.

"Come to me," she said to Ceuulna and my almost-wife bent on her graceful dancer's legs, touched her hand to Eltona's face.

"I can give you something for a love-present. You are a native, you can understand these things. Look into my eyes . . ."

I STOOD bewildered, and Ceuulna as motionless as death, her face white and suddenly blank, peering into the strange eyes of the female robot—staring and staring, while the weird eyes ran a gamut of glowing color from pale green to violet to rose and to glowing yellow flame and back again.

Ceuulna said:

"I will remember, Eltona."

I heard passing between them from Eltona a mighty flow of meaning that was not for my ears, so rapid and so deep, like a mind filled with text of huge meanings too great for man. And Ceuulna nodding, smiling, ghastly in the white-faced concentration of the hypnotic.

Finally Eltona closed those now terrible and death-weary eyes, released Ceuulna from her grasp of mental power. Ceuulna tottered and fell slowly against the long limbs and smooth beautiful body of the broken robot, and lay there unconscious.

I shook Ceuulna, brought her back to her senses. She looked up at me, and her eyes filled with tears, sobs racked her slim lovely body.

"Oh, Jim—she had such a wonderful mind and so sorrowful a life. She told me things I could never learn from any other living thing. She printed her greatest knowledge on my memory ineffaceably. I'll never be the same!"

"Is she dead?"

"Her thread is probably broken. But she may be brought back, she may be once

again the same. She is not sure how badly her living 'machine' is damaged. Something is broken. She was using up the reserve energy in the cell-syntha-batteries of her mind.

"I doubt if anyone on Venus understands such synthetic-life robots well enough to make repairs. She is dead—of our ignorance. She was probably the most valuable mind active on Venus."

Somewhere the Hagmen and Nonur were fighting desperately against an attack by either the Tuons, the Sea People, or the Nameless. I did not think it was the Nameless—because the rays came from higher, apparently from a fleet in the valley of the Ungi beasts.

I wanted desperately to get into that battle. I hated Nonur and the whole system of fighting age with the blood of children. I knew that my life, anyone's life, was a nothing to give for the defeat of the horrible scourge these vampires could become in the future if they flourished as they had done for the past centuries of their growth. First Hecate alone, then Spanish soldiers of fortune, then Venusan renegades whom they chose to aid them in taking over the Venusan city-states. Then back to Earth and such things as Nonur battenning on the children of Earthmen. Stronger and stronger the vampire method had grown, and now when I thought it had been wiped out with the death of Hecate, to find it entrenched under the southern half of Venus' continents, to find the whole of the Seven cities under their subtly secret rule, was demoralizing.

Taking Ceuulna's hand, I pulled her toward the rear doorways of the Hall of Yin Yan where I had seen the guards come and go.

"Ceuulna, you have been a servant here. Can we not get our hands on a ray, a real weapon? At least can't we see what is going on, find a vision ray?"

She took my hand, raced off, pulling me with her swift dancer's speed. I lumbered after, leaving the bound form of Montagna and the lovely tragic thing that had been Eltona, the living wisdom from the past. Leaving Yin Yan gulping sickeningly, weakened, perhaps dying, in his great plastic tank of life-fluid. I wondered what that stuff was—it was thick, viscous, my clothes and skin were sticky with the clinging, yellow, plasma-like substance.

Ceulna stopped me before a wide door-peered in. Carefully she edged forward till the whole room was in sight. It was empty, but had not been so for long. Several helmets lay upon the floor and blood was splashed across one chair before a great telaug-vision screen.

I FLUNG myself into the big chair, unheeding the blood, pulled the activating lever, swung the tenuous green penetrative vision ray across the regular grid of the borings, looking for action, looking for the Hagmen, looking for a chance to get in a blow. Ceulna bent to another ancient mech, curious, bulky and black with unpolished ages of corrosion, the curious grime these unoxidizing metals of the Elders acquire with time.

Soon her ray was swinging parallel with my own, and I hoped it was something potent, for my own may have had weapon-ray attachments, but it was not a type familiar to me.

Far-off on the wide highways sped many glimmering lights. Near at hand the caverns were vacant of all but sprawled corpses, cowering slaves, bewildered servants. Nonur and her crew had fled the battle. Whatever had attacked the caverns below Nicosthene had seemed too powerful for her courage to face.

I swept the widening cone of vision down and down into the caverns of the upper Nameless, listened to their thoughts exulting over the flight of their enemy. Searched on down beneath for some sign of Etidorpha, for the Nameless of the abysses below, so deep that Nonur had not known they existed. There was nothing to be seen.

Sorrowfully my mind searched for reasons for believing that Etidorpha had survived the attack of Yin Yan, found none but a faint hope that she was somehow invulnerable to death. There was a deep, powerful current of emotion about any thought a man had of Etidorpha. Immaterial as she seemed, there was yet a powerful magnetic attraction accompanying her appearance that made a man love, honor, trust the nature that dwelt in that grey moving nothingness. Had Yin Yan absorbed the powerful ionic force of her penetrative energies, been not weary but gorged with an intake of energy too great, was even now lying in his tank ingesting, digesting the mighty life he had drawn into

his repellent carcass?

I swept the rays sharp around to the tank where he lay, still and breathing in the fluid slowly, as if asleep.

Through all his body I swept the vernier adjustment of the telaug, reading each vibration, searching for traces of his horrible meal. Each tissue of his body I examined, bringing up the power till I could read the very cells of his stomach sacs as they sucked in the acid fluids, and reached with their fibers for bits of matter and flesh. There was no sign of life resembling her for whom I searched.

As I indulged this irresistible urge to learn the fate of the powerful, benevolent, alien spirit of Etidorpha, beyond the body of Yin Yan my augments began to shout with strange sounds. I sent the ray sweeping on and out toward the walls of cliff that hemmed the great crater valley.

Close, now, they sped, ship after ship darting into the great holes they had blasted into these cliffs, and on into the stretching mazes of cavern that were the underworld of Nicosthene. Inside the ships my penetrative searched, and on the screen sprang out the faces of the attackers. For a moment I watched, then silently bent my head and wept. Sobs shook me. My hands would not attempt to work further.

The ships were manned with the pitiful wrecks, the hags that had so short a time ago been vibrantly beautiful Tuon Amazons. Nobly they struggled with the death that was in them. Feebly their hands, once so skilful, urged on the space-fighters that require so firm a hand, such nicety of judgment upon the guide rods, such infinite co-ordination of hand and eye in close quarters. And still in their eyes blazed the invincible fire of freedom, that spirit that had long ago made their race throw off even the domination of man and love and home, that had made them the most feared fighters on Venus with sword or trident or far-spanning antique ray, with any weapon. Now Ceulna wept beside me, and in my mind I could hear the evil, vaunting cackitation, the vile, exulting laugh of Nonur who had brought this evil death of radioactive sand upon them.

It was from their vengeance Nonur had fled, craven before the flaming fire in their dying eyes. She knew she could not kill them all. In my heart I knew that Eltona had summoned them by some means from

her home in the deep, unknown jungle, then had come on ahead to see what might be done to aid them. And had died, helping Etidorpha.

A SHIP crashed into the wall near the great arches of the doors to Yin Yan. The feeble hands had been too slow to keep the hard-driving motors from plunging the ship against the wall of the slow bend of the great cavern way.

I leaped to my feet, plunged out toward the sound. Something I could yet do for them—something!

The long needle of graceful metal lay crushed. I darted around the bulge of keel, seeking a way in.

The round locks swung open in my face. There stood peering at me—Onua! Not the Onua I knew, but a pitiful sketch of her! Age, the horrible taint of near-senility, had descended upon her in the short span of time we had been apart.

With an effort I wiped all trace of my shock and repugnance from my face, tried to give her my heartiest greeting. But it was a sadly, inefficient effort.

The once disciplined, controlled lines of her face had relaxed, sagged; the whole once lovely, fully developed, sensuous figure was deflated. Some ugly force had drained the life-matter out of her. With a vestige of her old grace she put out her hand to me, feeling with her fingers for my flesh, hoping, I knew, that she would not find the same hot, feverish dryness of the radioactive sand emanation burns which had consumed herself. Hoping that I had escaped exposure to the blight that had slain a whole race of people.

I nodded.

"I escaped, my Oanu. Let me give you my arm; I will show you this place. It is the place where Nonur held forth. She has fled toward some other gathering point. There are seven of these great cities of the Marsh-men, as well as many smaller cities of Red Men who have colonized these southerly parts."

"Six more of these nests of hate and lust to blast apart! And I am weary, Jim, weary to death!"

"I want to show you a tank of fluid in which Yin Yan, a protean intelligent monster from the past of Venus, the last of his kind, still lives. The monster had control of Nonur's mind. It may be that . . .

"I have heard of Yin Yan. I did not know it was true that he lived."

"Here, Oanu, are some papers the Red Robe, Montagna, gave me for you. I thought at the time he gave me these that he was telling the truth and had turned his scarlet cloak the way of Tuon—but he has since turned again, so near as one can tell of one engaged in being a double spy. He lies there bound."

I took her to Yin Yan's chamber.

Oanu bent over the slender figure of Montagna. His eyes were deceptively mild, as he said:

"Oanu, the papers are more important than anything else. They contain the formulae for dunder, the legendary substance whose properties you must know from the old tales."

"Release this man, Steel."

Oanu's voice had for a moment the old firm authority. I looked for her in spite of the fact I had myself been repeatedly in the same position as Montagna, with everyone but Oanu and a few intelligence officers thinking I had turned into a willing tool of Hecate's, I could not bring myself to obey her order.

"He has attempted to kill me, Oanu. I think he fears that we will stop his blood supply, and that he is in truth trying to aid Nonur to greater power. He loves his life too well. He is much older than myself, he cannot live without the blood . . ."

"Release him," Oanu repeated, her voice rising shrilly like an angry old woman's shriek.

I looked at the viperine stirring of Yin Yan in his tank beside us. I knew nothing of his methods, but it seemed obvious to me that this was a case of his taking control of Oanu as he had of Nonur.

"Oanu, we will go back to the wrecked ship. If, with a ben-ray on you you still repeat that order, I will release him, not before. I do not trust him."

"I'll do it myself, you fool. And don't try to stop me!"

I PICKED her up, carried her from the room away from the great orbs of Yin Yan's eyes, watching her with a fierce, impelling stare. That beast from Time's abyss would not get anywhere with that attack. Once out of his sight, Oanu seemed to forget the matter, began to examine the papers I had given her.

"Dunder? It is but a legend. It is unbelievable that after all this time, it should prove to exist."

"I think it is but a trick of Montagna's. But if he tells the truth, it may be of use against the radioactivity that consumes you all."

Incongruously, standing there by Oanu and conscious of the terrible decay that had struck her, the face of the dying Hecate rose in my mind. The long black witches' snow white or fallen completely from the bare patches of her skull. Her face, that had been so flushed with children's blood under the grey skin, and rock hard, turned a real grey of death and furrowed with wrinkle on wrinkle till the shrunken horrible mouth alone gave the face resemblance to the human. Pityingly I glanced at Oanu. But she was absorbed in the thin feather-light sheaf of papers that Montagna had given me. A light of comprehension, of something like hope began to dawn on the shrunken face.

"Jim, there is hope! For the Tuons. For all of us struck by the radioactives from the treacherous Hag-ships."

"That is hard to believe. Montagna—though I have since come to believe he was lying—at that time thought that this dunder might prove a method of fighting age that would not require baby blood or the sacrifice of other lives to one's own."

"It could. It provides for the manufacture of synthetic flesh of all types, as well as for the synthesizing of the synthetic blood, the ancient Ichor. The Elder race used Ichor constantly. The natural blood is pumped out of the body, the Ichor is pumped in simultaneously. The natural blood is treated by being mixed with the Ichor for a period, then is replaced in the body. It is rather a complicated procedure, but once learned, would not be too difficult. Steel, I must return with this to our laboratories. There is so little time. Perhaps a week, perhaps two, and the last of us will be dead. The work must begin at once! Some of us will be saved."

With a pitiful simulation of her former grace and speed of movement, Oanu hurried toward the crushed ship in the great cavern way outside. I helped her into the round lock door, climbed in after.

Across her desk in the control bridge were rows of communicators, tiny microphones and vision screens. She pushed

buttons, activated the great multi-screen, began to give orders to the fleet far ahead in pursuit of the fleeing Nonur and her vampire fleet.

"Crona, take command. I must return to Lefern to the laboratories. I have a formula which will prove a means of fighting off the radioactive poison. It means hope for all of us. Send a guard of ships to make sure I reach there safely—and Halfan, Freya, Delor, the experts on radioactivity. It is a subject we know too little about.

I stepped forward beside Oanu, said:

"As soon as you have time, Crona, contact the Nameless. They have a great deal of experience with this dunder and have used it for an age. Some of them will know what to do to help us. Pick out those people among them who know this process called dunder, know the dunder mech which the formula is used with, send them to Oanu in Lefern. There is so little time to experiment. You will have to bend every effort in this direction that is not required in pinning Nonur to the wall."

I turned to Oanu.

"I think it would be smart to take Montagna along with us, too. He understands something about this. If the papers are genuine, he will be of value in deciphering them clearly."

WE LEFT the wrecked ship, walked back into the Hall of Yin Yan. His great eyes glowered, his lace-curtains of sensory and thinking organs rolled and unrolled venomously, a slow myriad of faces peered out one by one from the intricate folds. Oanu paid no attention. Ceulna turned from her engrossed examination of the prone body of the giant robot, Eltona.

"Do you suppose, Oanu, that a strong concentration of conductive penetray within her body would make her able to tell us how to repair her?"

"Repair! Who, what?"

"O, I forgot, Commander. This is Eltona, a very superior robot of the Elder work, who summoned you from Lefern. Didn't you know?"

"Didn't know. Thought it was you. She looks like you in a screen, Ceulna. Thought it was odd, you so different. But my eyes—I don't know, am not sure of things now."

"Of course, Oanu. She just knows everything. She has been living as a goddess of a primitive people. Steel was telling me about her. Her mind has been active all that time since THEY left. If anyone could help her friends, she could. But she was smashed by that gross monster in the tank."

I could feel the pulsation of Yin Yan's angry thoughts response as Ceuina called him a monster. Evidently he thought of himself as quite handsome. And evidently he was listening, might be in mental contact with his "servant" Nonur even now. The natural telepathy of which he seemed a master has no definite range, depending on the fine atunement of the magnetic fields of the brain cells. And the monster had such great strength.

I knew he remained passive now only because the crew of Oanu's wrecked ship had spread through the chambers, manned the weapon rays from which Nonur had fled. That he would be slain if he made a wrong move.

Oanu, evidently in time with my own thoughts, gave a sudden order to these unseen but felt watchers, her own crew now seated at the rays in Nonur's chambers.

"Some of you start making record on this thing's thinking. Steel says he has a mind, and he is very old. We might learn something useful from him!"

"Aye, Commander Oanu. At once, we will begin the suggestion record No. A2, there is no use in using the primitive record one."

BACK from fleet came three ships, hovering a foot off the cavern floor outside. We went out to them. I helped Oanu aboard. Then I turned to Ceuina.

"You will be more valuable back there, helping the technicians. You must have picked up something here that would be helpful to Oanu's plan? I will remain. I might be able to get into the fight yet. There are six more of these Hagmen's nests to clean out."

Ceuina kissed me, climbed aboard. Oanu said:

"I will take care of her, Steel. She will not be lost again . . ."

I knew that it would be the other way around, considering the weakened condition of Oanu and her warriors.

"Oanu, it seems to me, from the little I

know of radioactives, that it would be much better for you to go to Merdepon in the sea. The emanations are still deadly, and the effect will still be active. Their laboratories are quite as complete, and you would have their technicians to help you; minds unattacked by the sand's poison. Besides, I would not wish Ceuina to be exposed to the same rays that have caused this aging in you all. Your work would be much easier; go to Merdepon."

"That is where I had intended to go. Do you think me a fool?"

"You said Lefern!"

"My mind is like an old woman's, Steel. We go to Merdepon. I make such mistakes now."

"Ceuina, I will be with you as soon as Nonur is dead!"

CHAPTER XI

The sea rocs swoop and dive and rise heavy with prey, wide-winged and wise in hunting. The sky is home to them, the sea to me.

Oltissa of MerDép.

THREE long ships swept off, their levitator beams raising a fine dust cloud from the ancient floor, and I turned back to the gloomy, coiling thing within the tank. It had been hard to see Ceuina go away from me again, but it would feel better to know she was safe in Merdepon. To know that soon the Mer-people's ships would arrive to help in wiping out the last vestiges of Hecate's immortal devils.

I walked around the room, looking disconsolately at the place where the body of the robot had lain, thinking of her strange beauty and the weird fact that she was, in truth, a better; a designed, purposeful life with built-in abilities greater than today's humans. I looked at the place where Montagna had lain by the wall, before we placed him aboard the ship. I hoped vaguely that he was not evil, had somehow been controlled in his apparent action against us, was in truth against further growth of the baby-blood method of longevity. He could be an able ally.

I started in toward the farther room, to get a ray into action and check up on what the Tuons were doing with the action against Nonur, when from the great corri-

dor outside came the swish and pulse of a slowing ship. I ran to the wide doorway, saw another small ship with Tuon markings settling to rest. The round lock came open, and a grimacing, urchin face appeared. I yelled:

"Hank. Hank Farne! Where the devil have you been?"

"The women went off and left me! Since the blight made them all into Hags, they are ashamed to have a man see them. The fleet took off without saying a word to me about it. Maybe they forgot me, I don't know. You know they don't have a very high opinion of a man's ability anyway."

I laughed.

"Well, I need you, Hank. Come here and look at this thing in the tank they left me to watch!"

Hank came slowly forward, bent, his face scabbed with the burns of radioactivity. My heart paused in sympathy for the havoc the radioactive sand had wrought in his slight, active figure.

"What the devil did they drop on us, Jim? In Lefern, I mean."

It's the latest war invention of those busy scientists in the U.S. war department. Radioactive sand! Some of the bunch of Hagmen on Earth got it out of their labs with ray-spies, sent it here. Nonur decided it was just the thing to drop on the Tuons, since they are so proud of their beauty. She was right; it finished them."

"No antidote, eh. Just like radium—it makes you old and done. My back creaks like I was ninety. My face looks like it was pleated."

"If they stay alive for a few months, I think the effect will wear off, if they stay out of Lefern. I don't know—but since the sand itself loses its potency according to the treatment it received, from days to a year, and since the sand was not absorbed internally, the effect may wear off in time. But will they live long enough for the action to become slight enough? Will their bodies throw off the effect and grow youthful again? I don't know!"

"They? You mean *me*, too!"

"Oh, hell, nothing could kill you. You're poison yourself, you know. That sand will just get tired of trying, those emanations will turn right around and run, as soon as they find out what they're up against."

Hank grinned.

"I hope you're right. I'm glad to see

they missed you with the stuff. But what about Ceulna?"

"Missed her too. She has been here with Nonur, in her old job of 'recruiting', plus other angles I'd rather not talk about. But our medicos will fix her mind up again like they did my own, after Hecate. I sent her back to Merdepon with Oanu just before you came."

WE STOOD now beside the tank of Yin Yan, watching the huge alien thing wind and unwind his lace-curtain memory, spotted with faces of dead men and women, laced with strange figure and glyphs and pictures of things that the mind could not relate, but that were, I knew, the mind of Yin Yan, visible because of the transparent nature of his flesh.

"You are looking at a creature that not only eats other creatures but absorbs their mind into his own as a blotting paper soaks up an ink blot. That is what those faces are, the people he has been fed here by Nonur. It thinks, Hank. It thinks, talks, and is as old as the mountain above our heads."

"That could be a bad habit in a pet!"

"I had a curiosity here that would have really intrigued you, an Elder robot, who was alive, who was eight feet tall, and who had been married several times."

"The perfect wife, except she outlived her men, eh?"

"She was like a goddess, Hank. The greatest piece of art work in all the Caverns. And that is saying plenty. I would have been a candidate for her next husband, but I begged off because of Ceulna. When she made up her mind, turned on the love electric in that synthetic body of hers, her dynamos hummed. When she looked at you, it was all up. Can you imagine a scientist creating a perfect synthetic woman?"

"Yes, I can imagine it. But I never expected to see it!"

"She was a servant to a family of the Elders, called the Eltons. I will take you to the place where I found her—I mean she found me—when this is all over."

"I'd be delighted, since Oanu won't come near me, now that her beauty is gone."

"You mean you might find another, like Eltona. Why not Eltona?"

"I don't know whether you are kidding or not, but a mind that has lived that long

would have plenty to talk about after dark."

"Love was a complex art with that Elder race, and they built the art right into that robot, and then brought her to life. Such grace, such form, you can't imagine."

"Sounds pretty terrific. But what are we supposed to be doing while our women are busy fighting for us. Stand here and talk?"

"I don't want to leave this monster, Yin Yan. He might get lonesome and decide to take a walk. And God only knows what he could do, if he wanted to. He has a superiority complex, is too proud to fight anything but another superior being. He tackled Etidorpha, and I don't know whether she's alive, or whether he's digesting her!"

"And who might Etidorpha be?"

"You're asking, but I'm not telling. You wouldn't believe me anyway. You'll just have to wait and find out. Come on in here where we can get a couple of rays working and see what's going on. We can keep an eye on Yin Yan as well as the battle. They chased Nonur toward Ekippe, along the great highway. There are seven of the great cities of the Marsh-men, you know, and Hagmen under each one. It won't be easy. I only hope Oanu gets safely to Merdepon and sends a real force back here. The Tuons are on their last legs physically. Not in shape to fight. . . ."

"You're telling me. I know how they feel. I feel the same way—ninety years old and getting older by the minute."

In my ear a voice from one of the Tuons of Oanu's crew whispered:

"Oanu left us here to watch Yin Yan and as a guard over this part of. . . ."

A blast of sound nearly knocked me down and the smell of burning flesh⁷ came for an instant from the conductive ray. I knew without question that an enemy ray had blasted the life from the Tuon warrior, left a smoking heap of flesh before the distant ray-screen.

IT COULD be but one thing: Nonur had doubled back after leading her pursuit astray in the cavern labyrinth. She must be planning a counter-attack upon the Tuon fleet from this point. God knew how much strength she had summoned from the

other six cities of the Marsh-men. Vaguely I wondered, as I started on a run for the ray-mech in the next guard chamber, whether there were any Nameless alive in the abyss beneath in which they had remained hidden for so long. Whether Etidorpha lived or even now was a part of that absorptive brain of Yin Yan—that brain with all the qualities of a stomach, in a mental way.

I had just time to swing the great ray into action, send it leaping along the direction from which I guessed Nonur's flanking attack was approaching, when a blast of force struck the mech, flinging me back sprawling on the floor. The tubes inside the metal sheathing burst with loud reports. From the ray I heard Nonur laughing her witch's chuckle of exultation.

"I'm still saving you for my own pleasure, Steel! Do you think you will escape me again?"

I lay still, shuddering from the nervous shock always accompanying these force rays, so similar they are to nervous currents in the body that a near approach of one sends a man into a near-collapse from overloaded neural circuits. Into Nonur's hands again! I thanked the Gods that Ceulna was far, far away.

From where I lay I could see the great tank of Yin Yan in the distant chamber. As I lay there, too weak to move—my eyes may have fooled me—from his weird folds of transparent flesh a grey swirling mist arose, spun for an instant in a dance of triumph, wafted toward the walls, disappeared into the rock. Had Etidorpha been inside that thing all this time, battling for her life—to at last escape? Could herself be of sufficient strength to overcome that titan of brutal, alien strength? Or was my mind in a state of shock, in which any stray light gleam on the mist of the liquids over the tank induced such an illusion? Maybe I would never know. Etidorpha had evinced but a little interest in anyone but the Nameless race who worshipped her.

Within minutes Nonur's crew were swarming through all the chambers, in and out, bearing equipment, new tubes for the wrecked rays, new cables for the burnt out weapons' power, settling the great ships in an alignment calculated to bracket the oncoming fleet of the Tuons when it returned unsuspecting from its trip along the great cavern highway. I know from what I could

⁷ Penetray will conduct odors as well as all nerve sensations, heat, etc.—Author.

see that Nonur's plans were good, the work efficient and well ordered, her warriors grim-faced and apparently unruffled by their losses so far. Her mechanics and electricians were hurrying desperately to get the whole firing front of the rays aligned and ready. Myself lay where I had fallen, strength slowly coming back to me, my shocked nerves gradually assembling their power circuits again to activate my muscles, my mind clearing. But what could I do, surrounded by the whole armed might of the Hagmen? Cautiously I tested my arm, it moved. I flexed the muscles, tried my strength cautiously. Not nearly myself yet, I lay and waited.

My heart went out to that desperate fleet of dying Tuon amazons, using their last strength in an attempt to revenge the venomous deed that had brought the blight of radioactivity upon them. I knew they would come back here after they failed to find the fleeing Hagmen, would plan on organizing a thorough and exhaustive search, rest their dying limbs for one more attempt. My prayers went up to that dark inscrutable God that we do not believe in until we need him, then pray to anyway.

I should have known they would return, for I suspected that Nonur relied entirely upon Yin Yan for her planning and heavy thinking. I should have guessed she would return for him if chance offered. And certainly we had left the place wide open to such an attack with but the crew of Oanu's wrecked ship to guard the deserted center.

SUDDENLY from the far chamber of the tank came a vixenish shrieking, a snarl of female cursing in a terrible voice I knew could be no one's but Nonur's. A Nonur who had discovered some setback, I guessed.

I listened carefully, looking at the prone figure of Hank Farne to see if he heard. But he lay where he had fallen. The weakness of his body due to the radioactive emanations would allow a very slow recuperation from the force that had struck us.

"What has happened to Yin Yan? Bring that thrice-accused traitor Steel to me. I'll find out what they have done to him!"

Two of the huge-bodied blacks flopped toward me, led by a shrivel-faced Hagman in scarlet robe and hood. A black seized me by each wrist, dragged me, feigning unconsciousness, toward the great tank.



NONUR

Dropped before Nonur, I remained motionless, with my eyes closed. She touched one of my feet with a tip of a flame sword. The terrible burn made me scream in agony.

"Now that your wonderful self is awake tell me what happened to Yin Yan."

I knew there was no need for me to open my mouth, for the watch-ray had my mind on augment. I could hear my own thought, agonized with pain, automatically describing the battle of Yin Yan with the mist-being, Etidorpha.

Nonur turned toward the tank, saying to the numerous rays that nimbused her, waiting for orders.

"Stim him, give him ben, flood him with strong beneficials and stimulants. He may come around. I don't believe any mist could kill him."

Lying there, moaning at Nonur's feet, I decided with sulphurous exultation that Etidorpha had indeed remained inside Yin Yan, and had somehow conquered the strength of him, taken his life, wafted herself off on her own mysterious business again. How else explain what I thought I

saw moments ago? How else? How else explain the collapsed, motionless mass of lifeless flesh in the bottom of the tank. When Yin Yan was alive, his innumerable gill membranes waved continually, circulating the fluid, and his thought membranes had rolled and unrolled constantly. Anyone could see he was dead. I hoped permanently so!

I watched as those miraculous rays of the Elder race were poured in vast concentration from all the mech in range upon him, and Nonur stood waiting for results. I knew what those rays could do for a man, and they were wasting the miraculous health rays on an evil beast that should never have lived!

The splash, or reflection of the focus of beneficials upon Yin Yan was doing me a lot of good. I lay still, hoping that some of my strength would be renewed from the effect. Yin Yan stirred, his gills began to vibrate, his strange inward rolls of flesh to contract and expand.

It was an eerie, frightening scene. I was so inured to the unusual in my experiences since landing at Harak that I hardly noticed the witch-like beauty of Nonur's near-nude figure, standing like a statue by a Daemon sculptor peering, peering into Yin Yan's awaking mind. The vast crystal of the tank shimmered and glowed from the myriad of ben-rays, her figure glowed like my own with the diffuse plentitude of reflection, and the whole scene took on the beauty that ugly things can take on in a beneficial ray field. Yin Yan's awful folds glowed with a prismatic glory, the dull faces of the blacks and the shrewd evil faces of the Hagmen standing at a distance peering curiously at the awful life in the tank, shone. The black's eyes rolled fearfully. They stood in an awed fear of Yin Yan; he was like a devil-god to them. I could hear the cruel, careless thought of the distant harpies of Nonur manipulating the batteries of ben-ray, and the answering, lustful and coarse thought of the warriors who were watching with the range rays the distant approaches to this spot, to call the whole army into action at the first near approach of the pitiful Tuon amazons.

Their dying state placed them at a terrific disadvantage in this type of warfare, for fencing with the deadly rays and powerful shorter defense rays can depend wholly, for success, upon the speed and co-ordina-

tion of eye and hand, and I knew the Tuons were slowed, handicapped by the creeping age of radioactive emanations. They were like doddering old people, trying to defeat these blood-filled vampires, these powerful, ignorant savage warriors who served the vampires, usually in complete ignorance of their habits. For if they knew, they would know they were cheated, would demand the young blood likewise. Usually they died when they learned of the secret vampirism of their red-robed masters.

There were few people alive besides themselves who had actually seen them engage in the unholy pumping of a child's blood into their veins, and their own pumped into the child to be renewed.

They were necessarily few in number, and the wars with the Tuons and Mer-race had cut this number down by more than half.

IN THE room, which I knew must be the present center of the whole organization, there were but twenty of the red-robés, and perhaps a hundred of the warriors who were their immediate officers, their staff officers of the renegade and professional fighters who served them. These were of every blood on Venus, scarred and hardened in many a battle before they ever took service under the Hagmen. Men never went to work for the red-robés till they could not get a job anywhere else. For once in their employ, a man never left except by death, and this was known among warriors everywhere.

A certain number of the warriors of Venus are professional soldiers, serving now this ruler of this city-state, and now that. Wherever the chances of pay and loot were greater, there came a drift of hard-fared experienced fighters, and such slaves as Ceuula had lured with the stim rays and their bodies into signing with the Red Robes of Nonur.

A man might rise in the service after that, but he never quit. I knew why, for I had seen them killed when they tried to leave. The Hagmen wanted no witnesses of their deeds loose in the world. But even so, the Tuons had learned, the Mer-people had learned in their deep ocean cities, and their doom was sealed. Or was it?

Turning my head, looking at the hard confident faces, I knew that not a man there expected anything but that their rays

would wipe out the Tuons to the last brave female. And knowing how slow and feeble their hands were since Nonur's sand bombs had spread through the air above Lefern, I knew they had little chance of winning, and that they knew too that they could but go into death with blazing rays and burned hands fighting to the last gasp.

My mind sped on a thought of Oanu and her trip to Merdepon. Strange they had not told the Sea People of the sand blight that had fallen on their lovely cities, strange she had not mentioned it to me. Had something of like devilishness been done to the Mer-race? Had this mind of Yin Yan's linked with Nonur's evil head been able to plan a similar coup upon the mighty under-sea cities? I groaned, for I knew it must be true. That ancient mind from the seas of Venus must have figured out, from his immense knowledge of them, something that had served as a weapon to confuse, hold back, keep the Sea People busy while the Hagmen wiped out the Tuons. I groaned, for I knew Yin Yan would know what to do to blight a city in the depths of the sea, just as Nonur from Earth had brought with her the knowledge of the deadly nature of radioactives developed by the scientists of Earth's war laboratories, and had used it to such deadly effect.

My mind gave up the unpleasant duty of telling me all the things that must have happened to bring the great race of Tuons to this last battle. My mind refused to lose all hope, closed up, and began to dwell ironically on the lovely, too-soft lines of Nonur's figure where she peered through the walls of the crystal tank, bathed in the glow of the beneficial, beautiful as the Devil's own chosen. I cursed her silently, again and again. And in my mind a soft whisper answered my curses.

"We shall try, Steel."

Was it the Nameless? It sounded like a familiar voice, or was it perhaps a very distant Etidorpha. Was it the sweet young blind girl who had rescued me before? I could not know, but the secret soft voice brought a sweet and needed relief to the hopeless weary mind of me. If only I could have learned how that battle with the Nameless led by their young Master had turned out? I had been unable to find out what had happened since the two unfortunate Tuons' anchor cable had snatched me aloft.

FEELING like a sick man in a burning hospital waiting for rescue, I lay till one of the Hagmen signed to a black to stow me on his shoulder and get me out of the way. Nonur turned from her mental conversation with the reviving Yin Yan and said:

"Put him in a strong cell. I will have some fun with him when this is over. And that won't be long now, will it, Jim Steel?"

I looked at her with all the disgust I could put in expression and said nothing. There is really not much use in conversation with such as her, their mental patterns are so different, fixed unalterably in destructive pattern. A man cannot understand them anyway.

The black threw me to one broad shoulder and flopped off in the wake of a Red Robe, a man I did not know. He stowed me in a closet of the ray-chamber where Farne still lay on the floor, presently thrust Farne in upon me. The great metal door swung, clicked shut.

On most of these doors the locks have been burst, since modern men cannot understand the simplest of their Elder locks, have to blast open the doors to get at the treasures left inside. Then, when they want to use such a door, they have to put on a bar of the primitive type, big plank of wood set in sockets, fastened to the door frames.

We heard this bar set in place, lay in darkness. Farne moaned, I groaned. We said nothing.

Outside I could hear the hiss and sweep of rays, the blasting of force ray impacts, knew that a battle was in progress. I turned over, put my shoulder to the door just to see if it gave. It did, just a hair, letting in a crack of light. If I had a tool, I could slide it through that crack, lift the bar. I searched my harness; but nothing. I searched the darkness of the closet, felt over Farne's body; nothing.

The racket of battle outside lessened, drew away. It could mean but one thing: the Tuons were retreating deeper into the caverns, away from the great valley of the crater where we had entered. I could hear the sound of jets, the hiss of rays, knew the ships were gliding off on levitators down the cavern ways in pursuit. I waited, heartsick for what I felt was the death of the great Tuon race of Amazons. To me, they were perfection, a way of life without fault, their ideals and their efforts to make life

worth living finer than any other people. To perish so, at the hands of such evil ones as Nonur, was too much to bear.

CHAPTER XII

*Porpoise' swallow, waves leap high
Green-white, the running colors fly—
The laughing clouds roll silently
While the sun ducks his blazing head
The seas caress my straining thigh—*
Oltissa of Merdepon

On each side of her three of the red-robed Hagmen held heavy dis-ray guns level, pointing steadily at me.

"So you thought I had left with the battle, hah? They do not need me to kill off the old women. I wait here for more important game, and I shall slay them, too. Meanwhile your death will amuse me. Get down on your knees!"

I stood motionless, staring at her, the hatred and anger and frustration weaving a red haze like heat-lightning before my eyes.



I crawled forward slowly on my hands and knees but not before a good portion of my anatomy was scorched.

I DECIDED that with the fleet of Hagmen off again the caverns might be deserted, were at the least full of possible opponents than before. I threw my weight against the door, outside I could hear the plank creak and bend in its socket. Again and again I threw my whole strength into the thrust, and fraction by fraction the crack of light grew greater. At last I thrust my fingers through, raised the bar until it fell free of the sockets. I stepped out, looking at the sockets, which were split and wrenched and the screws starting from their holes.

A hideous laughter from across the chamber broke upon my ears. I swung, startled to see—Nonur. She sat upon a great chair before the big weapon mech at which I had been knocked unconscious once today.

One of the guns began to hiss. Just over my head the flame passed my hair. Inadvertently I lowered my head, the flame came down still burning my scalp. Down and down the man pressed the gun, until I was crouched on the floor to avoid the steadily flaming ray.

"Crawl to me, Steel. Crawl here to me!"

Behind me another ray hissed into action, burning my buttocks, urging me forward to escape complete destruction. I crawled slowly forward toward her on my hands and knees, but both rays had scorched a large part of my anatomy before I arrived.

"Kiss my feet, Steel. Before you die, you may have the privilege."

The burning flame forced my head down and down, and as my lips touched her foot,

she drew her foot back, kicked me in the face. My nose began to drip blood. Anger consumed me, I gathered myself to fling myself at her throat, but another red robe had pushed his ray-rifle muzzle in front of her. I knew exactly what to expect, I had seen such scenes before, though Hecate did not herself indulge her sadistic lusts in this way. I had seen such as Nonur humiliate a man as far as possible before death claimed him.

I knew the smartest thing I could do was to leap for her, make them shoot me dead,

I was to amuse her for a short time with my death while she waited for something to happen in her developing plans. I would fight, would amuse her. It was ridiculous to think of beating the thing bare-handed, but I thought of it perforce.

I straightened from my imposed crouch, leaped, swung a blow with my fist at the Ungi's middle. I could not even reach the thing's head. They are big! My fist rebounded from his barrel-like belly as from a truck-tire. It was that hard, that rubbery. Those thick, boneless tentacles of the Ungi



but I hesitated, hoping. . .

Nonur signed to someone outside my range of vision. I heard a shuffling sound, saw the six wide, rounded pads of an Ungi coming nearer. I could not crouch there—my nerves were getting too ragged after these last few days. I leaped back, tried to find a way to escape the thing. The six ray-rifles presented a barrier that did not need to fear the beast. They stood there, laughing a little, watching my fear. At their scorn, I pulled myself together, faced the thing. Nonur wanted to see me killed.

flicked after my arm, just missed grasping it. I sprang back, leaped in again and swung a harder blow to his side, leaped away. He did not even blink, just shuffled those six feet steadily toward me, reaching with those rubbery arms to pull me close, get his wide, fanged jaws into my flesh.

I DON'T know how long I kept that up, while Nonur laughed. My breath was coming in gasps, I was about done. Just when I thought I must surely collapse, a ray flame sprang from the rifle of one of

the Hag-men, drove the creature back. It hissed, ululating its weird cry like a banshee over and over, but it backed up, was driven into the next chamber where a black warrior with another rifle took up the herding process, driving it on out of my sight. I turned back to find a great black duck-foot standing where I had stood before, in the center of the great chamber before Nonur.

"Kill him, Anslar. I give you pleasure when you have beaten him to death. Take your time, beat him long, long! I give pleasure then. Me, Nonur, will stim you myself!"

The huge black nodded, his great feet flopped toward me, one ham-like fist swung at me. I ducked, put my last strength into a haymaker at his jaw. He took it like the Ungi, hardly blinking, and I felt his fist strike me on the side of the head. I fell flat. I lay there, getting my wind back, but a ray from a rifle burned me, stung me erect with fiery pain. The black knocked me down. The ray burned me erect. The black knocked me down. I was a mass of pain. Burns and blows had me nearly out: I struck at the black weakly, was knocked down. I couldn't get up. The black picked me up, began to beat me in the face with his fist. The world whirled in a great circular collection of flame-tailed comets around my head. Nonur's laughter rang in my ears, hideous, exultant.

"Having a good time, Steel? Do I treat you as well as Hecate? Too bad, isn't it? We are *so* sorry for you."

An excited voice began to harangue Nonur. The six stood waiting. Nonur said:

"Throw him back in his closet. Fix the bars anew. We will finish him off some other time. Things are beginning to pop down below. We'll get rid of those Nameless hide-outs now!"

I was vaguely aware of being tossed back in the closet, the door being swung shut, the bar's sockets being hammered into place. I could hear the swish, swish of ray sweeping the far chambers, Nonur's exultant laugh over some blow suffered by an attacker.

Farne said: "I was watching, Steel. I couldn't do anything. Maybe our turn will come."

I didn't even groan. I just sank into that blackness that had been so ready to engulf me for what seemed hours.

IT MIGHT have been a day, it might have been two. I came up slowly out of a fog of pain, felt someone shaking me. It was Farne.

"Wake up, Steel. Someone's coming for us."

I sat up painfully. The bar was lifted, light blinded me. Slowly my eyes adjusted to the glare. The slight figure, the transparent robe, the glowing figure beneath the white, the angelic effect of innocence and beauty and wisdom, intermingled delicately. It was the maid of the Nameless who had rescued me before.

"Do you make a habit of this?" I asked.

"Nonur has gone, fled again. A great new fleet approaches. Come, I take you to Etidorpha. You will die if not healed at once."

I tried to stand, could not. The girl said:

"You, his friend, drag him out. I bring a Xonador."

"Whatever that is, bring it," answered Farne, putting his arms under my shoulders, straining to drag me out of the closet.

The girl, seated on one of those sled-like affairs, appeared. The sled glided on its levitator force beams, stopped beside us. She allowed it to settle to the floor. Together, straining, they rolled me upon it. She turned the lever on the front, the pointer whirled across the strange symbols of the dash. The sled glided off, picking up terrific speed as it swung onto the great highway. Shortly she swung off again, took a rampway downward. Down and down we went plunging like a frightened devil fleeing for hell. The weakened body of me could not stir, but I yelled in fright. Farne said:

"Don't look, Steel. I can't stand it either. Just don't look!"

The minutes ticked by and still we fled downward into the rocky bowels of Venus. When at last I raised my head all means of determining whether we moved or were motionless were gone.

We floated over a vast sea of swirling mist. Far off, like horizons, I could see the rock walls from out of which we must have plunged into this sea. Above us was air, below was mist, swirling, sentient, apparently the same kind of mist of which Etidorpha was composed. The air was gleaming, phosphorescent, and fogged with a tenuous, vibrant substance which emitted

a soft light. I listened, trying to hear the maiden's thought, for I suspected her of being constantly in contact with the other Nameless, being a kind of *unit* of their collective consciousness. For so it seemed to me must be their nature.

She was not thinking to any distant race of her own. She was silent, her eyes closed, waiting. Presently below us the denser mist swirled, a formless vortex rose from the terrific depths one sensed beneath. Was this the very center of this world? Was this the very soul of the planet rising so monstrous, so all powerful, nearer, nearer? I did not know, but I felt that this was Godhead. The awful sensing of Presence became greater and greater. I bowed my head in awe, in reverence.

The tendrils of the moving mist reached and touched us. The thought I had come to recognize as Etidorpha throbbed within me:

"Children, I know why you come. I will help you, as I always do. Do not fear."

Then from that tremendous store that I knew was Etidorpha, from out of that sea of self that was her, throbbed through me a vital pulsing flow of life-will, a flow of what I knew must be her lifeblood. I knew now why Yin Yan had failed to conquer Etidorpha. Even that animated belly of a monster could not drink dry a sea!

The little swirl of *self* she had sent along through the rocks after the Master's craft, that Yin Yan had attacked, was no more to her than a finger tip, than a tiny drop of her blood, was one of her endless supply of eyes, of hands, of sensing tools.

Under the vast ecstasy of her energy flowing through my body I became unconscious.

WHEN I awoke, I was no longer afloat with the maiden and Farne upon a sea of life-mist deep in the core of Venus.

I lay upon the soft pillowing pleasant stuff I had heard called dunder. About me were several of the Nameless, squatted like Yogis, paying little attention to myself. Farne was nowhere about.

I moved a limb experimentally. There was no pain, my strength was nearly normal. I moved another, and the same result.

I stood erect, stretching, feeling my muscles for sore spots. It was as though I had never been injured in my life!

Gliding toward me across the soft pillow-

ing stuff of the floor came the sweet-faced maiden.

"I am a new man, Angel! Your Goddess is a real Goddess! Potent as any mythical immortal!"

"She *is* an immortal, but she will not give her favors to anyone! After all, she knows how great is her strength, and what need she may have of it as the years become ages about her; and she waits for her kind to return again. But she loves us, spends perhaps too much of her for our unworthy lives."

"Little angel, love her always. Now, tell me, why did Nonur flee?"

"A great fleet was seen coming from the north. She fled, but they passed on overhead, did not stop. I think they were the Sea People, as we expected, but I cannot know. Their shields were up and one cannot read with one's mind what lies behind."

"Tell me one more thing. When chance snatched me from the battle in the Gardens of Nicosthene, was your brother, the Master, killed? Did you people beat Nonur?"

"We fought only a little while after that. Then my brother signed to his friends within the city. The rays that had stopped the ships were shut off, we fled again. Their own ships were held for a moment, but Nonur began to fire on the city. That was the purpose my brother wanted, to show she was no friend to the Marsh-men. To show her and all her Red Robes for what they were, cruel, murderous pirates, so that no longer would they obey the Red Robes. He accomplished this purpose. Then he fled, I know not where myself, not back to the place where you saw the ships. Somewhere he has gone. I cannot know his plans, no one can, for they would let their thoughts out to a spy-ray. He waits somewhere now for the feeling against the Red Robes to grow everywhere in the Seven Cities. They will talk, their anger will grow, they have seen the supposedly good and benevolent Red Robes who have filtered into the priest organization of the Oracle's servants. He waits till strength and anger rises everywhere against them. Then he will strike them again."

"I suppose I would understand if I knew more of the political and religious set-up in the Seven Cities."

"Yes, my big one. Now that you have been made whole again, what will you do?"

"Little angel, if it were not that my heart

is another's, I would stay here and give it to you. But you know that cannot be!"

"I know. You are as a brother in my heart, and it can never be more. But such things are sad to think of, for I would love you very greatly and well—if I loved you!"

"First Eltona, and now you! Ceuina, it's a good thing. . . My Lord, she will read of my thoughts at some later time, and has she a temper. She will roast my ears!"

"And do you, great strong man, fear a woman's tongue so much?" The fragile lovely face of the Nameless maid was mocking, a little sarcastic, but mocking sarcasm upon her sweet face was the gentlest of the many jibes I have received in my life.

"Aye, little orchid of the darkness—the bigger the man, the more he fears a woman, I do believe. Now, take Farne: he can wind 'em around his finger. Me, I jump to a woman's whip without thought of evasion."

"Perhaps that is because you're so big. You love more greatly, and love makes a slave of everyone, soon or late."

"You have your slave, little one?"

"There are some applicants—" Her gentle humorous thought pulsed in my mind, for she did not use oral speech for such intimate conversation. "But I fear none of them have yet taken my heart."

"See that you take the applicant who does win your heart first to Etidorpha. She will understand if he is worthy. You are a prize not lightly to be given to any man, remember that, angel!"

"I will do as you say, big one."

FARNE came toward us, stepping gingerly upon the strangely living flesh-like floor.

"Here we are, Steel. Loafing in luxury, like true Tuon men, while the women are out fighting!"

"It's fate, I guess, Farne. I don't know what to do about it, do you?"

"That mist in the deeps was some experience. I'd hate to try to tell anyone back on Earth about that one."

"Or about anything on Venus! But she made my busted face whole—look!"

I turned my face to the light from the doorway, where the weird glow of the wall tubes came into the darkened chamber. Farne gasped.

"I expected her to heal you, but not to do a plastic job. My God, man, you're

beautiful!"

"Is it that bad? I read in the Nameless Maid's head that my face was whole again, but she did not seem to think there was any great change. Is it different?"

"It's not so much that she changed the form. It's the quality of the skin, or the light here. You look just plain beautiful, sort of angelic-like. I'd laugh, if it didn't frighten me a little. I guess I'll get used to it. But will you?"

"I don't have to look at it. Come on, let's get into something. God knows what's happening."

As I strode to the doorway a voice with misty fingers began to throb in my brain.

"Steel—I have given you my self, you are now a part of me. If I had not done so, you would have perished, for your skull was cracked, and blood clots were forming in your brain. My strength is in you, and will remain, perhaps for always. I know what you do; you are a part of my thought. I am telling you to go to Merdepon. Your loved one and the other Tuon females are in grave danger. The secrets of the dunder formulae are also apt to be lost. Go, and you will learn what has happened. Remain here, and the Tuon race is doomed. For the dunder formulae alone can save them. Go. . ."

I turned to Farne.

"Did you hear that?"

"Hear what?"

"The mist being—Etidorpha! She said we should go to Merdepon! It doesn't make sense. We'd be running away!"

"Look, if *she* said to do something, you better do it. I was awake—I saw her. You were too near dead to know what happened. She poured herself into you like water. You had better listen, if she can talk to you!"

"So we go to Merdepon. Come on, Oanu is in trouble, too! But what could happen in that place? It's too formidable for the Hagmen to attack!"

"We're going! That's all I want to know. That thing in the rocks said go, and I'm doing it. You might be imagining things, though. You were sure beat up. Your head looked as if a bottle of ketchup fell on it."

I called to the Nameless maid, who I knew must hear. She glided toward me again from the shadows. I asked her whether the message was real?

"Etidorpha has claimed you as her own.

I am one of hers, too. It is a good thing. You can hear her thoughts when she wishes. I was sick like you, near death, and she made me well. Now I hear her. She never lies. Go where she tells you. There is very real reason, for she never wastes her effort on a triviality."

I mused. If that dunder formula really could be used as a method of neutralizing radioactive poison or burns, then some delay might have developed. Oanu might be dead or too sick to explain. Ceuilna might have collapsed from the strain of her experiences. They might not even have reached the city of the Sea People. Anything could have happened.

"We'll find a ship and get going!"

"There are ships still in the great hidden hangars where my brother helped to refit them. I will take you there, choose what you need. Etidorpha commands—we obey!"

She took us on her sled again, drove us to the huge hangar-like rock bowl. There were a score of ships, some in disrepair, still awaiting the mechanics, others rebuilt after the war-damage, ready for flight. No one demurred as we chose a swift fighter, bade the young sister of the Master goodbye and lifted off the floor on the levitator beams.

Within minutes we were approaching the center where Nonur and Yin Yan had so recently been everything. Now they lay deserted, the last slave fled, and as we flashed past Yin Yan's tank I glimpsed the huge beast with his heads severally projecting above the rim, listening, watching. Farne flung a heat ray at him as we passed, not to kill, for we knew his mind would always be valuable to the techs, but just to hurt him, to get even a little for being what he was, a thing no man could stomach. He flopped back into the tank. The liquid splashed. We imagined his thoughts cursing us in his own terrible patterns which were almost unreadable unless he chose to let them be clear.

We spiraled up past the brilliant-hued cliffs of the crater valley, up and through the cloud sheath into the thin, dry air above the clouds. We sped northward at top speed, the air screaming past our sides and the clouds billowing a long trail of air pressure beneath our flashing ship.

Hours, and we dived into the cloudsea, without having spotted another craft, down and down and down, the water closing

about us without having emerged from the clouds. Only the instruments told me we were near the Mer-city.

Traveling only slowly now, for neither Farne nor I were exactly expert at piloting one of these powerful vessels under water, I had a good chance to look at Merdepon.

It came gradually into view . . . huge . . . glistening . . . speaking of an age of culture with every glimmer of light.

I think Merdepon is the original city of the Mer-race, though they never bothered to acquaint me very thoroughly with the ancient history of their race. It was built by the Elder race. What it was under their mysterious ruling purposes, no man now knows.

A series of tremendous blown globes of clear substance top the cavern ways that lead from Merdepon to the planet-webbing labyrinths of Elder caverns. Much of modern Merdepon is built within these vast globes holding out the titanic sea pressures. Much of it is within the caverns underneath the sea's bottom. All of it is water-filled, though all equipped with water locks to keep the water pressures everywhere low. The Mer-race cannot stand the water pressures of the very deep sea any better than an air-breather, though they can live at twice the depth a man could in a diving helmet.

There are whole sections of the Mer-race whose ancestry, in the far past, has adjusted them to greater pressures than others, whose ancestors lived in the shallower seas of Venus. As their social organization grew, these shallow breathers, and those needing greater pressure, intermingled so that there are Mers who need medium pressures for greatest comfort; thus nearly all their dwellings are equipped with locks and pumps which can be adjusted by a device analogistic to a thermostat to any water pressure desired by the individual.

Within the crystal globes—like a toy city in an overturned fishbowl—we could see the towers and terraces, the brilliant water-plants, the glowing fishes swimming, the graceful, long bodies of the Mer-race gliding through the water. Parts of Merdepon are the original Elder erections, heavy masonry, curved and buttressed against all possible earth shiftings, built for time—for they lived through such great spans of life that they had no use for evanescent work.

Beside, on top of, arching over these, the Mers had built their own brand of architecture, influenced by the nature of coral, by the decorative influence of the sea in which their lives were lived; great, intricate traceries of impossibly-flung arches, intricately pierced towers, rounded domes, minarets of pointed, much-angled and carved surfaces like Brobdignagian branches of coral, the windows the pores of the living stone—and everywhere upon the rock grew the water plants, the sea anemones, the trailing lacy water-weeds. I knew these were allowed as they kept the water fresh and oxygenated, kept it nutrient with their own life energies—and knew that even if it were not so they would be there for their brilliant beauty.

It was a view a man does not forget: the beauty and grandeur of Merdepon, a kind of hybrid of the might and age-defying strength of the Elder thought, mingled with its child, the lovely cathedral-vaultings of more ephemeral life, the intricate stone traceray that appeared as if a breath would waft it all away.

HANK brought the ship athwart the great platform that circled the huge, round locks, set it down for the official inspection we expected. The locks swung open, a tiny one-man sub shot out, clanked its grapples east to our craft. The locks of the two ships were seized magnetically together by the two magnets above and below—and Hank and I started wishing for waterhelmets. But the occupant merely looked in, nodded his huge head at us, motioned us to enter the first entrance lock. He was no one I knew. I did not like his looks, for he was of the "deep-water" Mers, and they are of a breed not so beautiful as the more numerous breed. Their spines are larger, their skulls thicker, their fingers shorter, and their mouths gross and inhuman. Strong; they are proud and contemptuous of other races, which is not the case with the other Mers. His face was not smiling, seemed to scowl upon us. I felt for some reason jittery as we released the magnets, jockeyed the ship for the now gaping lock-doors.

From the heavy, rounded masses of the Elder buildings there swung toward us several great rays, glowing in the water, and I knew they were the ancient defense rays of the original Elder work being used by

the garrison to see what ship was entering. Having an Elder ray trained upon one is very like sitting upon an atomic bomb, for with a touch of the operator's finger such a ray can become the most terrible agent of destruction. They touched our ship, the whole metal fabric became as transparent as glass, and I knew our weapons were checked before the rays swung away.

Our outer lock door swung open with a rush of water, and I peered through the glass. In the lock crouched a great-bodied Mer in a water helmet, and in each hand he held helmets for us. I released the dogs of the lock, the water gushed in. He waited like a statue, the low ceiling of the door much too small for his bulk, holding out the helmets. We took them, put them on. I released the mechanism of the outer door, caught hold of his harness strap. He backed out, swam off toward the great building which housed their equivalent of our Immigration Service. Hank and I bobbed along beside him like a couple of captive toy balloons hooked on to a zeppelin—or so it felt to me.

These deepsea Mers are larger than the kind I had grown used to when I was with them against Hecate. This one was all of thirty feet, I swear.

In my mind a question kept bobbing up: "Why was I meeting this type of Mer?" I did not recall having seen any of them in my former trip to Merdepon. I had understood they inhabited the southern deeps of Venusian seas, only came north to trade or in answer to a call for mobilization. Yet here they were as official receivers of visitors to Merdepon. A vague alarm kept buzzing in my head. But what made it? Why should I worry?

I could feel invisible telaug beams searching my mind, but knew it was the usual thing. Curiosity alone explained it: *anyone with a telaug always looks at the minds of newcomers*. One can always feel these searching rays when one enters a strange city or returns from a trip to a strange place. I can tell the presence of such rays, invisible and inaudible to an ordinary Earthman, because of my familiarity with their effects on thought. When a ray is searching your mind, questions pop up, one thinks over the past, one feels vague alien emotions over matters of no concern, and a self-curiosity which is *not* one's self makes the mind review for the intruder all



In the loek crouched a great-bodied Mer
peering bulbusously through his helmet

the past. There are several sensations that accompany such rays: one hears things for which there is no apparent cause, such as distant conversation where no one is in sight; or thinks of sex with a feminine view-point, in case it is a woman operating the ray. Or one's thoughts are shorted out to keep some other from observing them, etc. Or one sees pictures which do not seem to arise in the ego's own imagination. Differently constructed thought patterns arise—and in this case I heard some mighty strange thought from the big fishy minds, fierce alien lusts echoed within me, and the bodies of the Mer-women about took on a new and attractive significance. I knew I was being examined. I paid little attention, but I sensed an antipathy. A vague mental bristling of anger took place within me. *These minds despised me!*

Once inside the ancient, blocky building, the big horny-headed Mer swished into the main office. I looked about astounded!

"This is *not* the city Merdepon?" I asked, taken off guard.

"Yes, little air man, it is!"

THIE big Mer behind the low desk was sprawled at length upon a couch, cradling the slighter form of a smooth-skinned female whom I recognized vaguely as having been in this room upon my first visit. She was the earthly equivalent of a "steno." But even in the somewhat more open social life of the Mers, it was not usual for the stenos to loll in the arms of their bosses while supposed to be on duty. At the other desks where should have been efficient good-looking females of the Mer office staff, lolled instead the great-bodied deepsea Mers, a score of them. Armed; each man wore his great antique dis-ray in easy reach of his hand, and half of them had a slighter-bodied female beside him or near at hand. The huge multi-typers of the office were idle. There was none of the waterproof paper forms I knew were usual. The whole place had an atmosphere somewhat as if Pancho Villa had moved into the White House.

"I don't understand. I came here in search of the Tuon leader, Oanu of Lefern. My fiance, Ceulna of Lefern is with her. They have certain important formulas which they . . .

"You will see them shortly, little man. But first we must ask you certain questions.

It is known to us that you once worked as an operative in a mission of the Sea People to your planet, Earth. Is that true?"

I nodded.

His big mouth showed a long row of most ugly teeth, totally unlike the teeth of the lovely Mer women I had known. He said:

"At that time you were under the orders of one named Oltissa of the Mer Intelligence?"

"That is true!"

"That is all we wish to know." He turned to a big Mer hanging attentively on his fins a few feet away.

"Take him away!"

The Mer swished once, darted to us, seized one of us under each huge arm, and darted off. Within minutes an iron lock-door clanged shut on us, a bolt shot home. We were in an air chamber. I took off my helmet, looked at Hank.

Farne said:

"Stupe, there's been a big change around here. The ins are out and the outs are in. Don't you get it?"

"If it is, what about it? What's it got to do with us?"

"We'll find out when we find out, but I'll bet Oltissa and her gang are doing plenty about it. They might possibly suspect us of being sent by some of the outs to spy on the ins, in which case we will stay locked up till the outs are definitely and completely out!"

I sat down, looking at Hank wonderingly. It was too much for me. The Mers thought of me as an enemy because I knew Oltissa! Politics, thy name is mystery.

"Only trouble is, Hank, the Tuons will be dead before that time, and those formulae are important. If they shut up Oanu then they aren't doing anything about the dunder formulae, and the Tuons are going to die of the sand emanation burns."

"We gotta talk to somebody, Jim. This thing can't wait. I'll be dead myself if something isn't done soon. And I love that Amazon; Oanu is like . . . like . . .

"Like a wife, Hank."

"Yeh, only more so! I've got to do something. We can't just sit here and take it. Those big fish-heads think they can pull this on us. They won't get away with it!"

I grinned, for Hank isn't very big, and I tried to picture him pulling a thirty-foot

Mer warrior fin from fin. The resulting picture was comic, if it hadn't been hopeless as well.

WE SAT listening to the faint murmur of the water circulated through the city by big pumps. The cell was about fifty by fifty, for the Mers don't build even a prison cell small. Time dragged on. A faint sense of being watched told me some one had dropped a cautious ray in to us.

In my ear a tiny whisper said orally:

"I'm going to connect you with another prisoner. Don't show any excitement. These big toad-Mers are top-dog now, but it won't be always. They haven't made themselves popular."

Somewhere I knew a dissident Mer was sitting at some complex telaug with multi-beams. She or he was shifting one beam over another confusingly so that someone watching would be unable to tell just what was being done. Some of the Elder telaug mech has as many beams as a New York central has wires. No one but a mastermind could keep track of them all, and such minds no longer exist on Earth. They are utilized somewhat as a Hottentot would utilize a deserted telephone central-exchange—by ringing the bells, perhaps. No one today understands how these complex multi-beam outfits were used, for the Elder race had minds complex enough to handle them without benefit of correlating mech such as a telephone central uses.

Somewhere at one of these practically useless complex ageless machines, a Mer was coupling my beam to one directed at another prisoner. In a moment I heard Ceulna's voice: "Hello, hello!"

My heart leaped, and my thought pulsed out along the beams so that the reflection startled me with its intensity. Reverberant effects sometimes accidentally augment such contacts with two or more minds.

"Ceulna! Girl—talk! This is Jim!"

"Oh, Jim! How came you here?"

"That is a long story and you wouldn't believe me anyway. I just got tired of the Marsh-maidens. They can't compare with Tuon beauty, you know."

She made a little sound of anger. "This is not a time for humor, you oaf. Tell me, are you free?"

"No, little one, I am not. Except for a million tons of water and some iron bars, I am. This cell is definitely confining!"

"Oh, Jim. We have to do something about Oanu and the others with radioactivity burns. They will die without immediate treatment."

"Did she tell you how many are stricken, Ceulna?"

"Yes, I know. We must get free and reach these Mer technicians. Many of them are under arrest, too."

"I don't get it, Ceulna. What has happened here?"

"The deep sea Mers from the south thought they got a raw deal on the spoils of Hecate's cities. Mostly they were in Tuon cities, remember. The ruling Mers decided that since her treasures had for the most part come from Tuons originally, they should get the lion's share. The toad-Mers, as these smooth-skinned Mers call them, started a rebellion, took over the government in a coup-d'état. Since then they have grown steadily more and more overbearing and cruel. There will be a holocaust if they are not removed soon. The commoners will rise, and the aliens will kill them with the master weapons. It is a terrible situation, and the Mers of the more civilized city-states hate to start a Mer-war. So they are letting them have their way till some turn of events gives them an opening."

"Where do we fit in? Why pick on us?"

"The new officials are so afraid they will make a mistake that whenever they are puzzled, they clap the person in jail. So we're in jail, because they are too dumb to know what Oanu is trying to tell them about the dunder formulae."

"Ceulna, just before we left, Nonur was chased off by a big fleet. We thought it was a Mer fleet. Who could it have been?"

"It was a Mer-fleet. At the time of the overthrow of Merdepon's government, the fleet was away. Warned, they did not return to their base, but tried to contact the Tuons for a conference. Thus they learned what had happened, where the Tuons had gone, and set out to help them whip Nonur. That's all we've been able to learn."

"That leaves us just as much in trouble as ever. Our name is mud unless these toad-Mers wise up to what we want."

"They have put most of the educated Mers in jail as possible enemies. They fear culture, are themselves wild and uncultured—from the southern deeps."

"And Oltissa never mentioned them to

me. I thought the Mers were pretty well amalgamated—but this is different."

"The civilized Mers are ashamed of their more savage relatives. But they have always been loyal, and contributed to the military quotas regularly. This rebellion was a complete surprise. That is why it was successful."

"So all our friends are out battling Nonur and the Hag-men and we are sitting here wishing we were, too. I can't see any possible chance of our doing anything. But the Tuons *have* to be treated—right away."

THE subtle little voice in my ear said:
"Your three minutes are up. Perhaps some other time, soon, I can help you . . ."

I wondered if she was kidding me with that three minute stuff. Or just picked it out of my mind to confuse some listener whom she didn't trust? Or did she mean that soon she would find a way? That little invisible voice was my only hope—and I didn't even know if it was fish or air-breathing. It didn't matter. . . .

Day dragged after day. Maybe a week, and Hank had aged years. I knew they couldn't last at that rate.

CHAPTER XIII

*Are all those who in a Nation live
Condemned to be unwary,
Of each other
For nationality's sake?
An asp to harbor,
Blindly?*

Elder Critique On Politics

HANK and I were plenty tired of raw fish! These alien Mers never offered us anything else to eat.

Then quite suddenly, came a grating in the lock, the water splashed in the lock, and there stood Oanu in a helmet. Hank stumbled toward her, and my eyes brimmed. Age is bad enough, but the premature blight that had fallen on Oanu and Hank was terrible. They embraced, and I wept for the young strength that had gone so suddenly from them, for the grace and spirit that were now only faintly suggested by Oanu's bony, wrinkled form.

I leaned over, tapped on her helmet. She took it off, said:

"There is little time. The Mers are

busy outside the walls. Someone has attacked the city. I suspect it is the Mer-fleet from the south, but it could be the loyal colonists from the Earth-seas come to help the former rulers. We are left to our own devices, and a friendly Mer released us. We came to you, for you know our need. Take the formulae, go to a friendly city, get the work done rapidly. Do not think of us, Steel. Just get out of the city and flee."

My mind did a flip-flop. I said to the little voice who had connected me with Ceuilna:

"I need you now. Help me to find the technical engineers of Merdepon. There is not time to save these Tuons by going to a strange city. You must understand our need, help us. Take us to the hiding place of the wise men of the city. Some of them must have hidden themselves in secret strongholds from these new grasping rulers!"

For answer the ray seized my arm as if there had been a fleshy hand there. I knew what the distant operator meant. I put on my helmet, as did Farne, and started off. Hank came after, nearly supporting Oanu. With Oanu was Ceuilna, and I grasped her arm, hurried her along without speech. You can't speak through an air helmet in water without phones. I knew by that grasp on my arm that ray operations could be conducted if little noise was allowed to pass over the conductive rays. I knew too that if we made noise the operator would have to abandon us and take evasive measures from some suspicious listener.

The invisible hand on my arm led on. We shuffled clumsily along. Over our heads darted squads of great Mer warriors, carrying ray-rifles, cables, supplies. Warships drifted along the great water-ways in the distance, patrolling along the crystal walls to repel some break-through if attempted. Somewhere they were conducting a battle, and in the distance I could hear through my helmet what would have been explosions if my air helmet had not muffled them. Steadily the hand led us, through winding, tortuous passages, farther away from the big water-ways of the center city.

We entered a low tunnel through which no full-sized Mer ever passed. The locks opened, let us through. We were in an air chamber again. I took off my helmet,

looked out on a strange scene, suddenly familiar. It was the big lab where Hecate had been imprisoned.

Shuffling ungainly toward us was a Mer man strange to me. Behind him was a glass panel and peering through it an impishly smiling face. Somehow I knew this was the father, but the one who had led me here was the child. The big Mer's thought came to me now.

"My daughter has told me of the sad affliction of the Tuons. I have summoned my friends still at liberty. We will attempt to work out your remedy, though I had never known there was remedy for radioactivity burns however severe or mild."

FTER greeting us, the big Mer again retired to the adjoining water-filled room. Oanu sat down to a telaug and vision-ray screen, bringing the next room into full contact with our eyes and our minds.

In the room were a score and a half of Mer technicians. I had seen their work, and knew that whatever Oanu had in mind could here be accomplished if ever, anywhere. She knew it, too. Her pitifully wrinkled hands flashed over the key-board of the telaug, reading their minds, correlating their abilities, ordering equipment placed, reading the dunder papers of Montagna to them. All their minds hooked up together in the palm of her hand, operating as a unit, a tool, a single multi-mind in her sole control.

Hank and I were superfluous. I just stood there, watching and wondering. Would they be able to do the hitherto impossible; defeat radioactivity, defeat age? The life of the Tuon nation hung in the balance, but so did the whole future of intelligent life on two planets. If men could again live for long periods, for centuries instead of scores of years, they would grow into something worthy of the sons of the Elder races.

Otherwise we would continue in the blundering, painful sham we now call living.

At the far door of the adjoining water-filled room, two of the huge-bodied deep-sea Mers stood, harnessed and weaponed, brutal mouthed, alien in that place of glittering glass and coiling wire, of humming dynamos and bubbling retorts, of

microscopes and scintillant thought-exchange between scores of minds concentrating upon one scientific problem. I realized these were guards, bribed to allow these men the freedom of the laboratory. I knew not how that came about, but guessed there was little discipline among these scaly huge-finned monsters, mere caricatures of the gentle, cultured, graceful and powerful Mers with whom I had formerly lived and fought.

I realized that it had not been my idea that had brought Oanu here, but a carefully laid plan by her former friends and scientific associates among the Mers, that I had been merely seized by an idea at the behest of the ray-operator, skillful in making a subject do things she wanted without knowing it was not his own idea. That she had made me bring them here at my own suggestion merely to make sure I would not find an objection in my mind to her plans. At a ray mech of great complexity in the other chamber this creature sat. I knew as one always knows such things in mental contact with ray that it had been her love and pity for the Tuons that had made this scene possible. The complex criss-cross of beams reaching from the big mech at which she sat reached out over all Merdepon, I knew, switched that Mer's thoughts to an unobstructive channel, stilled that one's fears, moved this officer to think of a love-tryst instead of his duty to his military trust. All swift as light, her thought was guarding, protecting, aiding these laboring, finned Titans, and finding time, in the midst of all that, to urge them on with emotional stim rays, at the same time urge some battling ship off in the deeps outside to greater efforts against the interlopers in Merdepon. Watching her, the old awe and wonder at what the mind can do with the Elder tools once it has mastered the use of them even in part came upon me, and quite suddenly I thought of Eltona. Was that Eltona? Was it?

Eltona in fins, Eltona a Mer woman? My mind flung itself at her ray beams in question, and she heard, smiled mysteriously, mockingly at me. And I knew that somehow here was the new Goddess of Merdepon, Eltona masquerading as a Mer, by what magic I knew not.

It was her face, but surmounted by finny spines of the crest of the Mer race;

her long graceful hands, but with webs—and then I saw that it was possible. For an instant she let slip her mental power, and I saw that it was merely projected impression, that her body was the body of Eltona, but that she was wearing a hypnotic mask of powerful thought suggestion, such a thing as only she could have done, so that the mind looked upon her as a Mer, while in truth she was still Eltona. Strangely I wondered if I had seen Eltona as she was, or as she wanted me to think of her? I remembered the vaguely inhuman and terrible shapes of some of the Elder sculptures; the paintings that were bas-reliefs colored like life, in the dead ruins that surmounted her retreat in the jungle. The race who had built her were greatly different from the human. I remembered, too, the swift and soundless disappearance she must have made from the Tuon ship when it was captured by the Red Robes. She had just adjusted her mental thought emission to an impression of non-existence, and those who looked at her received an unavoidable conviction of "nothing there."

THE amazing things that can be done with electrically augmented and synthetic thought have always been a source of wonder to me, but none was greater to me than to realize that I had never seen the real Eltona! Even when she had dropped to the floor after her gallant attack upon Yin Yan, injured, immovable and in pain, still the mechanical, powerful, un-aging brain of her had kept up the illusion of humanity she had ordered it to send to me. Yet she was "only a robot." It was lucky for me that she honored my love for Ceulna.

Seeing her smile, I knew that even in the midst of her complex manipulation of every important mind in Merdepon for I knew from what I heard that was what she was attempting to do: run the whole alien mind organization which might frustrate this work if directed here even in the midst of her concentration upon the task of making hundreds of officers and officials remain in mental channels she prescribed, she was also conscious of myself and my petty thoughts of her. And I knew what she thought too: "Lucky?" Knew she meant: "you don't know what you missed, mortal!" Knew she meant that: "I am

the legendary figure, the immortal Goddess who takes mortal lovers. I am the figure about which the greatest poetry of mortals has been woven. I am Venus of the Hollow Hill. I am the Ice Maiden. I am the Elder robot."

"Robot?" I thought. There must be a better word for it. "Android . . . superior human, superior because synthetic, because designed by a God's hands long ago . . ."

Ceulna, seeing my dreamy, worshipful gaze upon Eltona's active, lovely, nearly god-like beauty, her long hands a scintillant blur upon the keyboard of a mech I knew Ceulna would not even attempt to operate, said:

"You are not in love with that Mer, Jim?"

"If I told you what I thought of her, Ceulna, you would disown me."

"I'll find out, you might as well tell me."

"You won't find out, because she will prevent it."

With a fleeting roguishness like smiling quicksilver across her face, Eltona sent a something toward Ceulna—and her face blanched. Then she said:

"Strange, I can't . . . What were we talking about? What was it, Jim?"

"I was saying I hope they succeed in the attempt to create an antidote for the poison, and you were saying: 'They are succeeding.'"

"I can read it in Oanu's face, that there is hope."

I glanced her way, saw her rapt, ecstatic concentration, and weirdly I saw a misty nimbus reminding me of Etidorpha. And I felt a strange relief and a wonder for the gulfs of ignorance man has bridged with the words: "It cannot be!"

VAGUELY my mind absorbed what the scientists were trying to do.

They were attempting to neutralize a complex effect of the radioactivity of the sand upon the flesh of the Tuons by constructing a dynamo along entirely different lines, to create an electric flow of entirely different polarities and properties than any heretofore used or created. This magnetism was of such a nature that it could be used to create a synthetic life, a life real enough, but of a different nature than natural life. I knew it was something of the kind of thing that had made Eltona, but different in this use of it. The big Mers were putting

together wires and metals in several kinds of dynamos, reconstructing others, leading the take-off cables into an intricate network about a vat of wood. In this wooden vat they poured a number of materials, some of them they handled with long tongs and from behind shields, and I knew that some of the constituents were highly radioactive.

Then they activated the magnetic network about the vat, creating a strong electric flow within the material by induction, and at the same time a strong pulsation magnetic field throughout the material.

Then they pulled a switch and the whole jumped and vibrated with the power. Eltona's eyes glowed, and I knew that nearly the whole roomful of scientists were unconsciously following her direction. She was making radioactive flesh within the vat, then repolarizing it in such a way that the parts that had become infected by the radioactivity were charged by their own activity with an electric which caused them to be repelled instead of attracted as were the unradioactive molecules of flesh. I gathered, perhaps alone of all there, just what she was up to. Oanu must have known, for her eyes often swept to Eltona in admiration for her thought.

After a time the big Mer techs took the material out of the vat. It moved, it lived, it was the stuff they called dunder in the caverns of the Nameless—and used it for furniture upholstery and wall coverings. I knew it was the same material of which Eltona's body had been constructed, upon a metal framework.

Now Eltona looked at Oanu, she arose, put on her air helmet and went through the lock into the water-filled lab. She lowered herself with the aid of the Mers into the big wire-encircled vat of wood. The lightnings flashed in a pattern of unleashed power. Oanu shrieked in strange agony, mixed somehow with a wondering ecstasy, and I wept, for I knew with a terrible happiness that the thing was done. I knew that the fleshcell's molecules that had become radioactive and were thus destroying the unaffected flesh molecules were rendered magnetically of an opposite polarity, were terrifically attracted by one pole of the field about the vat. I knew that the healthy normal flesh was terrifically attracted by the opposite pole of the big magnetic field, coruscating like living lightning, a vibrant terrific vortice of power



CEULNA

at the other side of the vat. I knew that the tiny parts that were radioactive were thus rendered unattached from the flesh, were drawn off and dissipated, while the unburned cells' molecules were kept in the body because they were *not* burned free of their supporting network of minute fibres. That this was an ancient method of cleaning and renewing the body, that each tiny cell-battery in the body was newly polarized so as to induct from the dunder electric and from all nature a healthy, undestructive energy, and that Oanu would emerge from the vat a new, young, healthy woman.

So it was I was disappointed in the appearance of her when she did emerge in the arms of the Mers. She was still the wrinkled old woman, though her flesh was pink and new. I did not realize that now she would grow plump and firm and unwrinkled, that these wrinkles were the wrinkles of a baby; like a new-born baby's flesh!

CEULNA looked at me with shining eyes. She too had been reading the thought that flashed in a complete common

consciousness like powered light around the room. We were all-knowing, thanks to Eltona's multi-beams, and we were all thinking what Eltona knew we must think to understand.

The ultimate interior of those dying cells of her body had been magnetically reorganized, one kind of healthy atom had been retained, another kind jarred and vibrated by magnetic repulsion completely out of her body, and the whole magnetic relationship of her atoms to the universe of magnetic flows around had been reoriented so as to supply her with a greater amount of that life-giving electrical inflow which keeps all of us among the living. Oanu had been freed of radioactivity, and its harmful effects had been nullified by expelling the harmed parts in extremely fine division.

Eltona, dominating the score of great modern minds about her as an orchestra leader whose baton was a wand of absolute force, a multiple ray of absolute control, dominating the scores of military minds in control of Merdepon's warriors in the same way, dominated me, watching, by the sheer incredible beauty of her synchronization of complex activities of her mind and hands upon the keyboard of the antique mechanism.

I knew that there were before her several still unsolved problems of great magnitude, she had to bring this method of regeneration to the Tuon warriors, who were for the most part on the other side of the globe, and locked, I knew, in intricate ray-combat with the Hagmen.

She had to accomplish the bringing together of the dying Tuons and the new method of freeing their bodies of the radioactives, she had to overcome and solve the whole complex problem of the Mer civilization, prostrate under a conqueror no less alien because finned and similar in appearance; had to solve the problem of bringing the Mers out of conflict and under her own absolute control just as were the scientists about her. She had, in simple language, to effect a revolution, make herself dictator, conquer the army of Mers investing the city, and loose them upon the Red Robes of Nonur in the southern hemisphere, and, after the successful completion of that war, bring about a vast application of this method of magnetic reorganization to millions of dying Tuons scattered over two hemispheres of a half-savage planet.

I could see her mind, in the peculiar clarity induced by the saturation of the water with conductive beneficial rays, analyzing, computing, deciding and arriving.

Then she acted. Slowly her appearance changed: she grew bigger to the eye, her beautiful mouth broadened, her female figure turned slowly masculine, her unweaponed harness began to bristle with arms. I was unable at first to understand what she had decided, what this sudden metamorphosis of her projected appearance was?

But when she turned her rays upon the two broad deep-sea Mers standing guard at the door, I saw them blink, knew their minds were suddenly under hers, knew they were believing and seeing what she had decided was necessary for them to believe.

Thus, without moving from her seat at the complex antique rodite-mech, she had impressed upon the warriors that she was the commander-in-chief of the forces of the southern deepsea Mers within Merdepon, and had sent them off on an errand of great importance.

WITHIN fifteen minutes they were back, and with them was—the same creature who now sat where Eltona had sat at the keyboard! He swam into the lab belligerent, his eyes wary, his hands upon his side-arms. He looked at Eltona and she looked at him.

Subtly his face changed. By what magic of hypnotic command empowered by the vast dynamos beneath the floor of the chamber, I don't know, but the commander lay his weapons one by one upon the floor, stripped off his bejeweled insignia and handed them to Eltona. In a blank-eyed trance he was led out of the chamber by the two guards who had summoned him there. Immediately after him came officer after officer, standing for a moment before Eltona while she impressed upon him some order which I knew had all the inevitability of a post-hypnotic fulfillment. Then they turned upon quivering fins, flashed out the door upon her errands. Within fifteen short minutes she had taken over command of the Mers, was the Dictator of the city of Merdepon. And the Mers believed she was their own hereditary king, their own commander-in-chief of the investment of Merdepon.

So it was that Merdepon was for half a

day under a process of complete reorganization, and when we came out of the daze of wonder at what she was accomplishing, we found ourselves boarding a great Mer war-vessel.

The newly-constructed dunder dynamos and the intricate mesh of cables were taken apart, stored aboard the ship by swift-swimming giant Mers.

Eltona, having installed a working government of original Mer citizens in power in Merdepon, having mobilized the entire fighting power of the city under her own command, came aboard.

The huge ship took off into the city ways, drove slowly out to the vast transparent walls, passed through the locks, drifted upward, took on speed. Behind us I sensed the multitude of rays weaving a coordination of command all through the fleet for behind us, one by one, nearly the whole strength of the Mers was taking to the air.

We swam up out of the giant waves of a storm wracked sea, up through the narrow band of rain-lashed air, up through the rioting forces of the vast thunderheads of the cloud envelope, up into the clear upper quietude of the stratosphere, sped southward with the "civil-war" of Merdepon a quiet orderly people far below. I stood beside a new Oanu, my arm about Ceulna, and my mind a daze of uncomprehending wonder. How could she do it? I had seen it, but the rapidity and complexity of her thought-maneuvers as she had taken control of a vast city with but one rodite-mech had been too much for one mortal mind to absorb. The to me insurmountable problems of strife between the separate breeds of Mers had been to her but elementary psychology, or the ABC's of hypnotism with a neural current of mental command.

I realized that she was perhaps the one person alive who understood the proper uses of such complex ray installations, and once having resolved to save the nation of Tuons from the destruction of Nonur's attack, all obstacles must necessarily fall before her just as they would have fallen before some Elder race technician trained in the control of subject populations by means of the mental compulsions of the rodite-mech.

"Oanu," I asked, "tell me, how did you repair Eltona? I wept when I saw that she was broken—I thought she was dead!"

"I reactivated her mind with conductive, read in her thoughts how to repair the trouble. *Guess what was wrong?*"

"I don't know, how could I? I can't even begin to imagine what lies beneath the beauty of that flesh-like substance."

"She blew a fuse in her back! I found a new one in a little receptacle within her chest cavity."

I snorted.

"A fuse—in Eltona. Sacrilege!"

Oanu chortled.

"If you could see inside her thought, her mind—oh my!"

"When I first met her she seemed so consumed by ennui, by the time of waiting that had gone by, and she seemed unable to make an effort of her own will! She is so changed, so dominating, so self-controlled."

IN SIDE her is a dial with several markings. Such robots were constructed so as to be able to be used in different capacities. I changed the setting of her dial from the symbol marking her as a subordinate to the one marking her actions as dominating. It is a simple change. The electric of her dunder flesh batteries flows now through a set of patterns setting up an ego consciousness similar to the human. She is no longer a robot, but a being in her own right. She now has every attribute of the human mind plus the infinite capacities of the infallible mechanical action patterns endowed her by her creators. It is a lucky thing for us that I studied the ancient writings: I knew what the symbols on her setting dial meant."

"You mean that within her is a panel? You opened a door in her body and inserted a fuse—and changed the setting of her control-dial so that she now acts from self-conscious motives, rather than from a robot's desire to serve?"

"Yes. There is but one disadvantage, and I for one do not think it will be that."

"What is the disadvantage?"

"Venus will have a new ruler! Her automatically correct logic will find no mortal mind of sufficient ability to do the job as she knows it should be done, and Eltona is already well on her way to the rule of all Venus!"

I gasped. Ceulna laughed heartily. Oanu's eyes sparkled with some of the old vitality. Ceulna said:

"All Hail! It is time the Elder logic had

a master to apply it. We have studied it, but we cannot apply it, for we do not fully master the movements. Venus will be a busy world for awhile, if what you say is true."

"I see myself bowing the knee to Eltona, and kissing her hand. It is the Elder way, but will the Amazons submit? Will the Mers submit? Will the savage Red Races? Will she not bring about a planet-wide war?"

"They will never know what happened! They will only know there is a *law*, and will obey the law or individually be segregated."

CHAPTER XIV

*Opened the vials of venom, green
Wrath-rays loosed on sad Ekippe
The Hag-Horde lair'd. . .*

War chant by
Oanu of Lefern

THE fleet under Eltona made juncture with the Mers under Oltissa about mid-day, over the city of Ekippe.

That was a meeting! The figure of Eltona, still wearing her projected mental impression of Ner-form, and Oltissa turning her beautiful nose up at her for resembling a deep-sea Mer. Oltissa thinking that here was a situation, herself being offered help by those who had so recently caused her flight from her home.

But Eltona's mind rose above the distaste and distrust in Oltissa's mind, and with suave and perfect thought images conveyed to Oltissa, where they stood facing each other on the bridge of Oltissa's ship, the state of affairs as she had left them in Merdepon, and perhaps with subtly calculated hints, something of the misapprehension under which she labored.

From the caverns below Ekippe interplayed a dense web of reaching ray-beams, interspersed with defense screens. Ekippe itself was lightless, I realized the people must have evacuated the city to escape the holocaust of sudden death from the skies and from the caverns. It was here that Nonur was at present at bay; here her allies came to reinforce her; here the warriors came from the other five cities of the Marsh-men.

In a fifty mile circle around the city hung Oltissa's Mer-ships, black screens out turrets shoved up above the screens, fired by remote control.

After a short conference Eltona retired

from Oltissa's flagship, returned to her own command. I had watched the meeting over the telaug, sat musing while below me the complex ray-beams intermingled in a death-lock.

One segment of the circle of ships locked about Ekippe were the Tuons, and these now withdrew by command of Oanu, were replaced by the fresh warriors from Merdepon. From all that I could see, Nonur was here besieged by a force that would wipe her out, and were grimly determined to do so. But the black shorter fans spread all through the under rocks below Ekippe, shut off all view of Nonur's forces. The ring of battleships kept up a desultory fire, with no discernible result, none that I could see with the equipment available to me.

Our ship withdrew, followed the line of Tuon battleships up and into the cloudsphere. I knew that Eltona meant to treat every Tuon still alive as she had Oanu, knew with rejoicing that the Amazon race would not die!

The long needle of Eltona's ship flashed into the lead, and I wondered idly if she was obeying the summons of Etidorpha. I could hear her calling, but it was not to me she was speaking. I had been hearing her so steadily since my immersion in her misty strength that I hardly noticed her singular presence in my mind, not consciously.

Over the mighty mounts of southern Venus, down into the great crater valleys we sped, and after us came the ships of the Tuons, wobbling with the shaking, dying hands upon the controls, so that I sent a telaug beam after Eltona, saying over and over:

"Slowly, slowly, Goddess Mechanitis,* their hands are weak and unsure, they cannot follow you so fast, but they will try, for they are heroic of nature. . ."

She slowed the great pulsing power of the mighty Mer-ship, sent it in a slow, drifting dive down past the incredible walls of that valley. Again we entered the opening the Master had blasted in his flight, and without question, Eltona took the tortuous ways that I knew led to the sea of living mist that was Etidorpha. Why should she take the Tuons to her? I could not understand why she needed her. We had already proven the efficacy of the for-

* One of Diana's numerous names in the past
—Author.

mulae provided by Montagna. How wrongly I had judged the man! Playing his double part perfectly, he had been forced to do what he had done to me, out of concern that nothing should happen to keep the Tuons from receiving the information. Yet, I could not understand . . . I gave up. The job of a double-spy is hard enough to play without trying to figure how another man would do it.

SO IT was that the Tuon ships, so pitifully few now, came to rest upon the ledge of rock encircling the heaving sea of Mist I knew was the body of Etidorpha, the creature that proved to me the tenuous forms of life said to live God-like and forever out in the sunless voids of space *do so exist* and once visited Earth and the other planets of the solar system, once long ago when the sun was yet unborn.

How had she come to remain here in the center of this cloud-girdled Venus? Her thought I probed with my questioning mind, and could hear a part of her musing at my suggestion of the past—and vast, incoherent to me, pictures of a way of life beyond the grasp of my mind hurtled strongly into vision. I saw Etidorpha left behind by a people she had never seen—because she was left an unnoticed seed growing within the rocks, not to be intelligent life until an age of growth.

Etidorpha had never known her own race! Her gestation had gone on while the sun had blossomed from a small red spot on a huge planet at the center of the solar system to a vast flaming sun, scorching all the planets with its mighty heat, and had lain in the cool center of Venus while the first heat of the sun had died and the worlds had swarmed with life under the beneficent life-rays of the new sun. She had grown prodigiously within her rocks while on the surface life had grown prodigiously too. Trees had mounted until they out-topped all the mountains now known, and nothing had died—then. She had lain there thinking and unknowing her own nature while the vast races of the Elder groups had grown huge and had left for larger homes in space; had lain there while age had come down upon the swarming undying life from out of the sun and the blight of radioactivity had infected all the planets with the seeds of death. And had become in those ages the mighty spirit that

she was now, whose wisdom was beyond wisdom, the child of the tenuous Gods of the ethereal worlds of cold space—Etidorpha!

Now her misty fingers reached out, touched each of the ships that must have seemed like children's toys to her, and I wept as the ports opened and the pride of Lefern filed out before Oanu. The pride of Lefern, the crack troops of the Amazons, the best of all the Tuon nation, were a row of wrinkled, feeble old women, their harness hanging from their skeletal bodies, their eyes near blind, their teeth fallen out, their heads for the most part bald. Oanu wept, Eltona wept, and Ceulna crept to my side and buried her head in my arms.

I could not take it. I went to my cabin and closed the door. But Eltona busied the Mers about getting out the dunder dynamos, rebuilding the field net of cables, preparing for the treatment of many at once—there on the ledges of rock overhanging the great, slow heaving life-mist of Etidorpha.

Verily I believe she brought us there that she, Etidorpha might keep the flame of life burning within them while the beneficial effects of the treatment had time to make them strong again. Oanu was rapidly regaining her color but it would be years, I knew, before she regained her flesh and her skin filled out with firm muscle.

Presently Ceulna came in to me, her eyes wet with tears, and flinging herself on the sleeping couch, gave vent to her grief. I merely sat, trying hard to think of something else. To one who was a member of the many Tuon clans and partook of their pride in their appearance, in their grace and bodily vigor, in their ability at the "games" and other events such as the biannual dance contests in which mates are chosen for the next love period. It must have been even harder to bear than for myself, who had been a part of their life for such a short time.

Even I was grief-ridden, could not swallow the great lump in my throat that had arisen at sight of the emaciation and white hair of the once lovely and vigorous warriors.

"Ceulna," I said, "it might be a relief if cloaks were decreed to be worn for a year or so until their bodies return to normal vigor. Mourning cloaks, or bright colored ones, rejoicing that the blight is beaten; but *cover up* their stricken bodies from their

own eyes for a time! It is too terrible to bear, what has happened to the most beautiful women on Venus!"

She looked up, trying to stem her grief.

"I'll talk about it to Oanu. Something like that might help. O, Jim, it is so terrible, and they bear it so bravely. I cannot stand it!" She gave way to her sobs again.

"I wouldn't feel so badly, Ceulna. If anyone can pull them out of this tail-spin successfully, it is Eltona and this weird Etidorpha. With such Elder Wisdom at work and alive about you, you cannot fail to again become a great people. Let the Mers carry on the war for you, while yourselves regain strength and find a place to live again. The cities of the Tuons will not be livable again for a year or even two. Nonur said that, and who else knows what period the radioactivity of the sand was given?"

"Oanu has ordered all the cities evacuated long ago. We are building anew . . . with such feeble bodies we must build new cities—"

"I would live in the caverns as the Nameless do until the original cities are free of the poison, for your people have not the energy for such building now. What formerly took them a day will take them weeks of labor now."

A DAY passed, and two more, while Eltona got the process underway of treating each of the Tuons with repolarization fields, with the dunder magnetic fields that defeated the disintegration proceeding through their bodies cell by cell. Then she came back to the ship.

We lifted from the ledge, drifted gingerly up from the depths where the lair of Etidorpha defied the sun's dis magnetic forever, drifted into the great hangars where the Nameless' ships waited for the return of the Master and his men, the Nameless warriors who so little looked the part of men of war.

There Eltona held long converse with the old bald men who were left behind. Ceulna was the only Tuon left aboard the big Mer craft, the rest were Mers of the Northern shallow-sea variety, milder and more intelligent than the others, though Eltona had included two of the large fierce southerners in her immediate staff for appearances.

Ceulna and myself occupied a cabin

which was free of water. To enter the rest of the ship we had to put on our air helmets. I wondered whether the water affected Eltona's mechanistic interior, but apparently it did not. To the eye she resembled a big, fierce male Mer, though she swam somewhat more slowly than the true Mers. I could not get over my wonder at her facility in deluding the senses. The supposedly infallible perceptions of the human race were to her but childish things, as easily misled as a child audience is bemused by a Master magician.

After the conference with the Nameless oldsters, near a thousand of the unused robot bodies were brought to the ship by the sledlevitors of the Nameless, taken aboard. Then our big ship glided off toward the surface again, going out through the opening the Hag-men had blasted through into the gardens of Nicosthene. The city lay under us, apparently deserted. I saw here and there a hurrying Marsh-man, evidently one sent back from their temporary encampment for supplies or news. Somewhere out in that mighty forest of gigantic trees lay the Marsh-people, awaiting the end of the ray-war in which they were as yet neutral.

Eltona shot the ship aloft with terrific acceleration, leveled off above the clouds, sped northward toward the hot belt. Apparently she was not worrying about the progress of the war with the Hag-men, had other things on her complex mind. Myself wondered plenty whether the Sea People alone could hold her under Ekippe, but I had not the effrontery to question Eltona as to why she left the battle for so long without her. There must be a sufficient reason.

The ship entered the clouds again somewhere near the equator, came out above a wild, mountainous jungled land. Settled slowly through the trees. I gave a cry, watching through the port. Below among the vast trees lay that tremendous ruin in which I had found Eltona ruling as a Goddess to the little tree people whose skin was like colored lizards or tree toads, but had otherwise a human appearance. Below I could see them swarming, hanging from the trees in clusters. Over my telaug came their simple thought, and their chittering cries of alarm as the mighty warship settled down beside their vast shrine.

I threw my telaug vision beam to full

color upon Eltona. I wanted to see her metamorphose, see her change into her former appearance when she greeted the people who had been her servants and worshippers for such an endless number of centuries, for I had a sneaking suspicion that during the change I might see the real Eltona. I did not believe I had yet done so! The bodies of the robots we had taken aboard in the Nameless caverns were not all human of construction, and none of them were the equal of Eltona in workmanship. I wanted to know what Eltona really was, and whether she had worked her mental impression magic upon me when first we met or whether she really was the superwoman my mind insisted upon. Was she not rather some peculiar machine which made about her hypnotic visions to seduce the minds of men into any paths of belief she wished? Was she perhaps *not even walking* when we saw her, but drifting on levitor beams, and giving off a mental vision of wonderful sculptured legs in motion, of perfectly balanced and too-beautiful body moving to enchant? Or was she in truth a completely synthetic life-form, a product of a God-like creation by some master of the science of growth and life of long ago?

AS SHE stepped from the water lock into the air and the reddish sea water gushed out cascading and sparkling in the sun as it fell through the plumed and blossomed tree limbs toward the earth far below, there was an iridescent shifting, an aura of glory sprang for an instant into view about her and then subsided into . . . my Goddess, Eltona of the human shape. But there remained upon my mech-recording apparatus a photographic impression of something, something my mind told me was not human in form. Feverishly, with my mind tearing to be free of the attraction this synthetic life held for me, with my soul full of a disloyal guilt because of my love for Ceuina conflicting with this irresistible attraction growing within me for Eltona, like a criminal seeking a pardon, I extracted the spool of wire and the little metalloid film roll from the mech, turned to the projector mech beside the ray. Upon the screen sprang the picture of Eltona as the great round lock opened, the water gushed out. I slowed the spinning mech to its lowest point. The image ceased

to move, the great greenish body of the Mer-leader began to run together, streamers of aura sprang from the powerful magnetic field about her, and as the last of that picture of a mighty leader of the huge-bodied Mers disappeared from the screen, I stopped the spinning spool with my hand.

My head began to spin instead. For not my Eltona stood there smiling slightly, not my lonely Goddess from the past, but another thing unearthly, unbelievable! Man-like, woman-like, but neither. She was angelic, sexless, eternal as a sculpture of a God, and the love that was in my heart burned in another way. Beside me Ceuina gasped in wonder.

"What is she?"

"By all the Gods that ever were, I do not know, Ceuina. I only know she is to be loved, but not the way my mind was trying to, not the crude attraction that was growing in me. Do you love her, Ceuina?"

"I had a strong attraction to her, but she was feminine, like a very dear sister I thought of her, but I knew her so little!"

"To me she was becoming too great an attraction. I wanted to free myself. And I have ensnared myself in another way!"

"I too feel what you feel. She is above us, she is something greatly more than a robot in our sense of the word!"

"I think she is an experiment by some past master of life synthesis, endowed with every quality their race held dear! Made in an idealistic mold, and made immortal as truly as they could. Somewhere the man that made that divine creature lives and pines for his handiwork today! She was never left behind except some mighty barrier sprang between her people and herself, some barrier of nature, some suddenly flaming sun or terrible barrier of force vortices out in space. We'll never know what became of her race."

"We will have her for our own private Goddess, Jim! We alone will keep her secret for her."

"Yes, we will not tell. She has her reasons for concealing her nature."

"I think I know why she does it."

"A man's eyes can stand only so much of glory, Ceuina. It is good for me that I uncovered the secret, for something that could never be was stealing my heart from you—and who else could make me happy but you?"

"I'll take care of your heart, Jim Steel!"

You have no call to worry about it at all!"

"I shall try that a little harder, my sweet."

"See that you do! *Eltona!* First Hecate, and now *Eltona*. And Nonur had her eyes on you, I suppose. Do you have a weakness for monsters?"

"Hardly. She nearly killed me at our last meeting."

"That doesn't mean anything. She kills everyone, soon or late, whether she loves them or not. You monster's pet, you!"

"*Eltona* is the reverse of monster, you must admit."

"Yes, Jim. I cannot blame you. It is good you have had enough of the ray experience to so use the apparatus and uncover her."

CEULNA and I helped the little spotted people carry out the robot bodies, helped lower them to the tree paths that led down to the mighty ruin far below. After that, we just followed. Our Goddess did nothing but walk ahead, looking too beautiful to live, and I knew that was what the little people expected. But what was she going to do with the robots? What connection had robots with the battle with Nonur, with our desire and hers to rid Venus and Earth forever of the parasitic blood-users? The Hagmen must be killed to the last man—what were we doing here?

Eltona looked at me askance as my mind insisted on asking these questions over and over. I heard her reply:

"Haven't I yet demonstrated the value of robot-life in battle? Haven't I shown you what a superior thing an Elder robot is, that you should ask me such a thing? With these, there will be no least chance for Nonur to come off best. No tricks, no clever treachery, no device of her puny mortal mind that these will not have an in-built reaction for. You will see the reason we have come so far from the battle presently. And one more thing, my Jim. Are you sure I did not fool the film so as to release you?"

Eltona laughed, a silvery music of far-off delicate chiming, as of a spirit laughing from paradise upon a poor mortal who could not get in. A mocking, yet a kindly laugh. She must have been one who made men dance to her strange music on that glorious Elder life that is forever gone from the planets of our sun.

I resolved to make sure of that, with other records taken when she was not aware of eyes upon her. She heard that, and laughed again. And the strange procession wound downward by the lashed platforms of limbs, down the long ladders, along the stately branches bowered with the long plumes of leaves, lit by the burning white light that the hot sun burns through the cloud layer in the hot belt, led by the laughing Goddess, tall, impossibly graceful, the wisdom of a mightier-than-mortal race sitting upon her face and peering out her eyes—and I could not stop thinking that she had *blown a fuse* in her chest-cavity not long before!

But, my mind would answer: "So can a man be put out with the breaking of but one tiny nerve in his head. And it is not nearly so easily repaired!"

Behind us the little spotted people toiled and sweated and passed the rigid white bodies of the robots along reverently with many soft exclamations, and calls one to the other, and soft coos of excitement and padding little feet upon the poles of their tree walks. And we wound down and down and came at last to the great stone doorway where the carved beasts sit forever grinning upon a world that has passed away, forever holding the vast arch of twined stone figures that reach up and support the crumbling stone above that is the mightiest castle on Venus. Passed through and on into the great circular court where likewise strange and awesome and sometimes basilisk figures stared at us from the stone in which they were frozen by some magic long forgotten.

WE TOOK the darker of the passages, the one that led through the great beast's mouth into the downward path again, and in the darkness we knew that our eyes missed more of the mighty art which had created this dwelling for creatures greater and more appreciative of such things than ever men could be.

At last we came into the wan light of Eltona's temple, where the little spotted animal people had worshipped her unknown to other men of Venus for so many silent centuries, and she had sat and waited for her Masters who came not. And she had married men who had found their way here to this great mystery in the jungle, that was spoken of but never seen, and saw the

Goddess as beautiful as the legends of their grandfathers had said—and they had stayed with her as long as they lived. I wished vaguely that I had been such a one, brawny and hardy, blasting my way through that untamed morass of teeming dangers with a heavy red blade in my two hands and a young man's curiosity and will to see the great Goddess who reigned in the temple of the spotted people.

Ceulna took my hand and the wish died in my heart. So we stood before Eltona as she took her seat for an instant upon that throne that had been hers for so many empty years no man could count them. Worn was the stone, marked deep where she had sat and wished for some other duty to claim her subservient will, some other life to arise and make it her own—and it had never happened. I knew that if ever one woman had blessed another, Oanu had blessed Eltona when she had made that adjustment in the mechanism of her interior that gave her will the right to rule her, instead of lesser men's commands. For Oanu knew there were no greater minds alive now, no one worthy to give orders to such as Eltona.

Standing there as Eltona ignored us and gave orders in the chirrupings of the spotted people, I thought of the genie of my childhood books, and that they too must have been such able creatures, yet forced to serve the unworthy mortals who happened to learn the way of that command. How sad a thing it was that none had ever understood that the ancient magic was *not* a mumbo-jumbo, but a science that needed study to unearth the real sense beneath the magical occurrences, and so bring to men so much earlier all the good things that could be developed from the minds and abilities of such powers as Eltona. From the ancient books that were burned by the bigoted churchmen of the past could have arisen a mighty science so much earlier if only men had known it was *not* black magic or something to be frightened of, but only the remnants of a people who had gone before and left such as Eltona.

I thought of how wrong our modern educators were too, to miss all the true mighty meaning behind these tales they called "nature myths," "fairy tales" and such names. I was glad to be on Venus where the ancient monopolizers of the cavern

secrets and the secrets in such ruins as the one that housed Eltona had been unable to keep all of the science of the Elders from the general mind of men, but had died and passed away and left their secrets open to the race, for the use of all.

Meanwhile the long gleaming bodies of the robots were carried past the throne where Eltona sat musing, and ranged in rows upon the floor within the chambers beyond.

ELTONA rose and passed within, and we followed her, feeling very young and foolish and utterly useless as she set to work to bring life and motion again into those bodies so long inactive.

It was black magic that she did! She brewed things in great metal pots. She mixed liquids and distilled colored steams. She spun wheels and ground things into powder—and we watched and kept out of the way.

The weirdly staring eyes of the empty robots looked at the ceiling and Ceulna and I walked along and counted and inspected them, and wondered just why each was different from the other and just what they would be like and be able to do when Eltona had brought the mysterious life that burnt within herself into these bodies too.

Some of them were tall and graceful and bare of any semblance of flesh, pure gleaming white metal, shaped beautifully to human form but thin and rigid, like bones; and some of their eyes were empty of the eyeballs and stared blackly empty up at us. Others had shreds of strange material clinging to their metal limbs, so that we knew they once were clothed with soft flesh-like material as was Eltona.

Others were not manlike at all, but had four or more leglike stalks beneath them, and many long tentacular arms upon their spherical bodies; others still were wheeled, with intricate mechanisms upon the wheels so that they were not meant to look like life at all, but were essentially machines. Two hundred of the strange bodies she had brought, and I did not know if there were more in the Nameless caverns or not.

One by one Eltona opened the weird bodies, poured into long-dry receptacles the strange life-fluids which crawled within her vials, and which she had made out of so-called dead materials. One by one she

replaced the broken eyeballs, the little torn wires within the open cavities, filled each its many tiny receptacles with strange things she brought from cabinets set in the walls.

In the great chamber outside, the little spotted people chirruped softly and bowed their faces to the floor and hunkered there. I could hear their expectant thoughts awaiting the mighty magic their Goddess was making. Waiting to see the glory of life. Was she not the creator of all life everywhere? Of course she would make life again. She needed practice in the way of her magic. That was natural that she would return to the job of creating. Perhaps she would bring the Gods back from the new machines she had brought, and the old days would come again, such as she sometimes sang about when she was alone and weary and sad! She was bringing back the way of the first world before men were as they are now—a nothing. And she was making Gods, now, to do the work for her! I wondered to myself if they were not more right in their ideas than were ourselves, seeing Eltona with our mild educated eyes that were blind to the real God-like wonder of her work!

One by one she brought those dead things back to life; one by one they rose up and regarded us with grave eyes in which life burned, brightly they regarded us and wondered, as I could hear with my strange powers given me by Etidorpha and my long use of the telaugs, wondering how puny the race of men had grown since they had fallen asleep. Wondering how long, how terribly long it must have been they were asleep for things to have changed so much on "The Planet of Love."

Wondering many things too complex for me to follow. And waiting for orders from Eltona. Eltona had made, I knew, an adjustment in their interior, turned that dial of difference which Oanu had turned in her, and I knew these creatures would obey no one ever but herself. Creatures? My mind could not call them anything but Gods and tell the truth, yet I refused to call them anything but machines, even though I knew something of that living stuff that Eltona had created sat in their electrical minds, at the center, and looked out with a new consciousness of self, and lived and was alive, and was no machine at all, but protoplasm of some different

kind than our own but yet alive.

THE mind of a man gets accustomed to wonder, gets used to explaining the unexplainable with easy phrases which shrug off the necessity for admitting you are not great enough to grasp the mighty things of truth before your eyes, but the shell of unfeeling defense against wonder which I had erected to keep from madness in these God-caverns was cracked by the sight of that eerie assemblage of mechanical godlings brought into being by Eltona from the very sleep of death. Given back their memories, their terrific ability built to cope with a world that teemed as no place we know teems today, created for problems and perils which a man cannot even imagine today, they stood or rolled or walked or flew—and all looked upon Eltona with glowing eyes in which gratitude dominated the emotions. Robots unemotional? You never saw an Elder robot! They *built in* emotions with a vengeance. Anger, no! But gratitude, affection, honor, ideals, the desire for active creative action . . . they had all the *necessary* emotions and a few more beyond my grasp. They were like living pieces from a chess-board of a million squares; myself was like a checker-player trying to understand them. It was an impossible task, and Ceuina and I stood about like they did, waiting, with our eyes on Eltona, eyes in which our own gratitude for her work shone too.

And I could not help but feel that of all the robots on those great laboratory chambers, ourselves were the *poorest* constructed, the least worthy of our creator, whoever he was or when!

But perhaps *our* creator was one of the *lesser* lights of that Elder race, *who knows?*

Sometimes I believe the Bible, for it says we were created out of the dust of the Earth. I watched Eltona, and she used much more than dust to create life within those intricate machines again. And Eltona had been alive no man knows how long.

Certainly alive long before that day that Adam and Eve left the Garden of Eden, for she knew the masters of such life herself—and the Bible does not seem to know them well, and pictures them hardly at all.

Eltona says they left these planets long ago, and the Bible fails to note that the

Gods have left Earth. Perhaps it was at the time that they left that Adam and Eve were cast out of the garden, perhaps as unworthy to take on the long trip? Perhaps too fragile of body to survive the rigors of such a voyage? Who knows?

The Lost Books of the Bible relate how Adam and Eve dwelt in the *Cave of Treasures* for a long time after that. And Eltona had remained waiting in her cave of treasures ever since! Certainly she must have been older then than the races descended of Adam and Eve!

These very ruins were older *then* than the human race on Earth. But it is scanty evidence to go on, for the Bible is very vague and no one knows for sure who wrote it, though some say God wrote it. But it is a subject much avoided by thinkers, for words said along those lines are so apt to be misunderstood if one questions ever that Adam and Eve were not the first things to live and think and act as men on Earth, or anywhere.

Well, the Bible spoke of the great race of the Gods in many places, and so do I, and Eltona was a creation of the Gods as was ourselves. That her bones were of metal did not change the fact that she lived. Whether the Elder race had some supreme God above them all, I do not know. The Bible says so, and relegates the rest of the races of space to an ignored status. I think that gives a somewhat untrue picture.

These robots were like newly awakened dead, like many clean minds coming to a soiled earth. Whether their eyes and their minds had always been so innocent of evil, of selfishness and the baser emotions, I do not know. Perhaps it was an effect of their long sleep, of their long waiting. Perhaps some slight mental activity had remained, and the long, long meditation had given them the perfect philosophy of life. Whatever it was, they stood waiting for Eltona's orders with an effect of their combined presence over the telaug beams of their own inner mech—very like an array of angels.

SOME of them went to work for Eltona, finishing the process of rehabilitation. They mixed the soft synthetic flesh with the dunder magnetic formulae, the same sort of thing the Nameless used for the upholstery of their weirdly living cham-



ELTONA

bers. They spread and sculptured this living stuff into place upon the bare metal limbs and bodies of the robots. When they were through, those of the robots with human frameworks were ideally fleshed humans in appearance, though larger and more muscular, and somehow divinely beautiful. For all the tired little details that mortal life leaves upon the flesh were not present. The dark circles that hover even under the most beautiful eyes, the tiny invisible crowsfeet that mar the most lovely faces, the sag that is just noticeable on the most vigorous figure—all these things were not present. Like department-store window dummies, only vastly more so, they were too perfect to be true, yet they lived and thought and acted.

There was a sadness in them, too. I knew they wondered sorrowfully where the race of beings who had created them had gone? Where the centuries had gone that had so changed their world? Where their friends and the old ways of their life had disappeared to? And I could hear Eltona swiftly explaining, softening the blow of

the terrible changes that had come to Venus, and at the same time giving them a new ideal to fight for: the task of bringing back the old happy way of life to this planet again.

My eyes were hot with some strange emotion as I listened to Eltona's fiery thought building from their despair at the new conditions of their life a desperate resolve to remake the whole social fabric, the whole way of life of a planet. Swiftly her mind described what could be done, and I listened to her thought, though much of it was far too fast for my mind to grasp, I knew I had found in her a new and powerful leader whom I *would not desert*. One who would outlive me, so that seeking for other leaders would never have to be done by me! I knew what Oanu had done when she changed that adjustment in Eltona's strange living mechanisms. She had given Venus a new Goddess!

What would she do, now that she had a force of these superior creations? What would she do next? How would she set about cleaning Venus of such ailments as Nonur; the ailments of which Nonur and her kind were but a symptom, and not the prime cause?

CHAPTER XV

*Rode Surtur,
His very sword a ray of light
Snatched from the Sun!
... for the third time crossed the cock,
Assembling all for Ragnorock!*

"Elder-Days"

J. C. Jones

I THINK that *time*, in the world so far in the past, must have had a very different flow or flux than our own. These robot's minds were geared to a faster pace of activity than a human mind could follow. Things began to happen with a startling, almost frightening rapidity. I think that I had not noticed this before because Eltona, being awake so long through the gradual slowing of the human race's reactions and mental activity, had adjusted herself automatically to the slower rate of the mortals about her. But not so these newly awakened synthetic lives!

Speaking so of the robots, I thought of the past on Earth, when all priests had shaven their poll so that the secret people

could get a better ray-contact with their mind, and so control them better to their way of thinking.

How sad it was that still they did not know of such things as Nonur under their feet, out of sight, preying on them endlessly. They could not allow it to be said there were caverns in the Earth without crying: "Madmen . . . Servants of Satan . . . Fiends from Hell." How sad it was that men did not know the glorious truth of the Gods and the God above the Gods, as well as the idle parasitic race who had masqueraded as Gods for so long and so disastrously for us all.

Fascinated by the rapidity of the robots, I watched them bring from the many great tunnels of the ancient place an array of weapons and vehicles, and work on them with their hands a blur of speed. I looked longingly at Eltona supervising the ultra-rapid labor with a silly wish that I might somehow be the equal of these machine people in mental power and speed and strength. Her great light-emitting eyes flashed at me, telling me she had understood.

It was scarce an hour later that she called me to her. Into my arm she shot a hypodermic big enough to use on a horse before I had even a chance to protest. The stuff coursed through my body like liquid fire, bringing rapidly in its wake an awakened perception, a vast awareness, a strengthening flow of increasing vitality. Then she led me by the hand to a great wire cage that had been constructed in one of the ships they were refitting from the storehouses under the crumbling ancient palace. These were one of those rarest of finds to such as Ceulna, a place where the Elder race had left complete supplies which had remained untouched by the destruction of ignorant vandalistic bands through all the time that had passed. In the great ship they had dug out of the age of dust blanketing everything in those untouched stores, they had built what Eltona called a *teupcage*. It was a device which created within the wires surrounding it a field of magnetic which terrifically increased the rapidity of every electrical exchange that occurred within it. When I entered, and Eltona activated the wires about me, life and motion about me suddenly slowed to a snail's pace, though myself remained very well coordinated. What had really

happened was that all my neutral currents had been speeded up so that life, even the rapidly moving robots, seemed barely to crawl.

"Now perhaps you can keep track of things and be a part of it all . . ."

Eltona took herself off, leaving me there in the cage, which was equipped with telaug and weapon and levitator-mech controls. I soon found myself busy helping the now slowly moving robots with the levitators and speeding up the work everywhere with my telaug beams a step ahead of everyone else's thoughts. Ceulna joined me after a time.

"Jim, you're moving inside there like a man on a hot stove. What's got into you? I never saw you move like that; I can't even see your hands!"

"Come in, slowpoke, and find out for yourself. Then you tell *me* what it is!"

I held the door open, and she entered. She nearly fell down as the door closed, with surprise at the sudden change.

"It's a time machine, or something. Everything outside has slowed down about ten times!"

"It's just a conductive and reenforcing magnetic field which speeds up your nerve energies. But it sure does change things, doesn't it?"

WITHIN a few hours the robots were ready for what lay ahead. The ships they had brought out, three great vessels, burnished all over and each separate mechanism serviced by the ultra-efficient living machines, lifted silently through the trees, accompanied by the awed cries of the frightened little spotted people, weeping and waving their grief and their goodbye to their Goddess. They could not understand what was happening, which was not strange, as it was too much for me as well.

Southward, swiftly and high, keeping within the wet cloud sheath, for Eltona wanted no word of her coming to precede her, went the four vessels, the long black craft of the Sea People dwarfed by the tremendous gleaming things the robots had unearthed beneath the great palace of Eltona. Southward, toward Ekippe and the battle line, if there was still a battle line? Ray warfare is apt to be sudden death for whole armies, does not ordinarily take long for some weapon to find itself outranging the others and wipe out the whole of the

enemy. But with such masters as Nonur and Oanu and Oltissa behind the ancient mech, I doubted that this sudden ending would have occurred. Most of such ray wars consist of bringing some rays into action, gradually sounding out and testing the defense and the range of the enemy, then calling from the far ancient store-rooms just those weapons best designed to meet and overcome the weapons of the enemy. But in this process, whole armies of men can fall to the terrible killing power of the vast-ranging penetrative rays.

That was why I knew that these four ships would contain probably the deciding factor of the conflict, if in the time we had been gone one had not managed to out-range the other. These robots must know the range of ray weapons, know exactly what weapons existed to out-range the greatest that Nonur's limited knowledge of the Elder mech could imagine. Eltona certainly knew how to defeat Nonur, I more than suspected. Yet the four ships were a pitifully small force to pin such large hopes upon.

We passed over the volcanic peak of Nicosthene still keeping within the obscuring clouds, though I knew that if there were enemy rays watching the skies they would not fail to find us with the penetrative rays. Beyond, toward Ekippe I could hear now with my telaug the deep mental waves of the discharging ray-bolts which are audible only to the mind. My heart rose. At least the conflict still continued. Nonur had not yet won free, nor the Mers been beaten!

Still high, we saw at last the vast ring of ships circling the city of Ekippe. Here Eltona stopped, hung there far from the battle while from the three ships following came over my telaug their ultra-rapid thought and many strange sounds of activity. I swung my telaug upon the nearest of the three robot-manned ships. I didn't want to miss a single motion of that amazing crew, of that too-rapid pseudo life and its ungraspable mental activity. I was like a cat fascinated by a television set. I couldn't understand it at all, but I wanted to see what happened next.

Ceulna, hearing my eager thought, telepathed me:

"Get in your stim cage, Jim. Then you can follow them."

WE BOTH raced for the contraption, and once inside, we could watch the robots with some chance of understanding their now naturally-timed movements.

Instead of watching the robots working over their strangely different beam mech, analyzing the character and nature of the rays visible from the rocks beneath Ekippe, Ceulna swung her own beam down toward Nonur's position. I said:

"That is what the robots are doing, watching Nonur. We will learn more about Nonur reading the robot's heads while they work on the problem of Nonur's strength."

Ceulna grinned at me.

"I hate her so I just wanted to see if she was still alive, or if someone had managed to pot her."

"She is an admirable creature . . ." My voice meant the opposite of admirable.

So it was that Ceulna and myself had the opportunity of a lifetime, to see the thought-patterns which the Elders had built into the minds of robots work out in battle tactics.

With long needle beams the robots reached down toward the barrier rays blanketing all sight like a wall of darkness circling the city of Ekippe. Ekippe itself lies in a little valley between three great mountains; and a mountain stream, bright as crystal, flows through the center of the white-walled city. The buildings were much like those of Nicosthene, though taller and more graceful. It was an older city by far from its appearance, with that charm of age and use and living in the many deep worn paths, the mighty trees almost obscuring it with their limbs, the terraced gardens. But like Nicosthene, the Marshmen had abandoned the place to avoid the terrible rays of the battling forces. The Marsh-men had no weapons with which to join the struggle if they had wished.

The needle beams seemed to cause no effect in the dark barriers about Nonur's stronghold, and apparently by their thought the robots did not expect any. They merely touched various instruments to the view-screens of the mech emitting the beams, took a reading, scribbling down the reading upon a pad. After a series of such tests, they put their heads together over the pad, scribbled the figures out in large indescribable numerals of some forgotten system of mathematics upon a larger black plate upon the metal wall, and nodded gravely over

the result of their figures. Then one of their ships swooped in a dive toward the barrier—and I watched them as they picked up speed. Down, down, their inhumanly capable hands and mechanically fearless minds cool and entirely detached from any personal interest in the possible disastrous results of their "test", they went.

As they neared the barrier, one of the great fanlike spreads of ray dropped before them, and Nonur's fiery disrays lashed at them. Lances of flame and the heavy explosive ray-bolts of blasting force sped toward them, lanced past them. They leveled out within feet of disaster, shot up in a long zoom. Returning to their former position the business of computation went forward again as calmly as before the dive. I realized they had drawn Nonur into using her heavy weapons to find out just what she had to fight with, to throw at them.

Now came a business of bringing many cables of heavy metallic weave from the storerooms, linking ray-mech to ray-mech, computing the combined power on the blackboard again. A business of turning the resultant great beam upon the black barriers below, and watching them flame into nothingness and collapse like the tower of darkness falling.

WITH the collapse of the barriers, the three robot ships dived in ultra-rapid evasive zig-zags, firing their heavy beam as they came, and below the lancing blasts of ear-splitting power became fewer. Unscathed, chased all over the sky by the reaching, futilely lashing beams of destruction, dancing at top speed of their space-spanning jets, flashing over the fortress in eye-defying ambits the battle went on and on. The robots were evading the terrible beams, but they were not reaching with their short bursts of fire the nerve-centers of the defense. After minutes of this ultra-rapid maneuvering, the three ships, now dominating the whole scene of battle, withdrew again to their former position behind the battle lines.

Followed a long conference in the antique tongue between Eltona and her revivified synthetic beings.

I couldn't follow all their thought, though I tried hard. What they meant to do was so unbelievable I couldn't take it in. I just stood there and stared as the power-cable-changing, the mech-moving

went on in the three strange ships. Then from the three great master beams there flowed down upon the smoking earth about Ekippe a great blue beam. A very weird pulsing beam of force that looked to me like it was made of molasses being pushed along by little flickering flames.

For minutes that beam played upon the whole area of rock below Ekippe. And slowly it took hold; slowly the motion of the whipping, reaching, blasting force beams slowed and at last stilled entirely! They still burned upward toward us, but now these beams were still as though all below had fallen in death.

Eltona turned to her great master beam, sent it flashing out around the waiting circle of near a thousand ships: Tuon, Mers, a few Red-men, allies of the Tuons, and far off to one side the hovering ships of the Nameless.

"Descend, the rays are still. Advance and occupy the enemy territory! We have laid down a blocking force in which no ray is effective. Advance and give them your swords! Slay, slay! No ray can move or hurt you."

Looking over the scene, I realized at last what had been done. The robots had thrown a powerful magnetic field across the whole area, and in the strong field, all impulses of energy were altered, so much so that the electrically powered ray-motors which moved the great beams could not even exert power because their flows were altered in nature just as though it had passed through a transformer's coils. The great beams burning up at us were no more harmful now that so much light, their very wave-length changed into harmless impulses, and the power to move them was gone as well. I laughed. For now, surely, the day of vengeance had come! Only a weapon like a sword would work in that field of energy.

The robots and Eltona watched with a grim humor, I swear, as I buckled on the long-sword given be by Prince Donar, as Ceulna put on her own battle harness and sword. The ships settled to earth just outside the great circle of the field of force. We dashed out the ports, all of us but the Mers, and Ceulna and I sprang across the magnetically flattened grass toward Ekippe's broad avenues, to enter those caverns where for the Hagmen was no ship to bear them away that would function now—for

the field forbade all energy flows. To enter, and to slay and slay till there were no more blood-suckers alive on the planet of Love.

A HEAD the revivified Tuons marched, rank on rank, still thin, the scars of radioactive burns on their faces, but their flesh firm, their step sound. Ceulna and I sprang forward, raced along the column seeking Onua.

Rank on rank the warriors of Venus, the allies from the Red cities, the Marshmen who had many of them joined the war against Nonur and the Hagmen, all those of Venus who had suffered the loss of some dear one, a child or friend or best beloved, marched into Ekippe from out the ships that had held the ring around Ekippe so long.

The penetrative rays had long ago revealed, within the city, several entrances to the Elder caverns. One lay beneath the great central tower of the city. Another lay beneath an adjacent building and a third beneath a temple on the outskirts.

These entrances were nearly jammed with officers striving to hold back the fury, to keep discipline.

Following Onua's grimly erect figure, we entered at last the central tower of the city, followed into the passages beneath, marching steadily down and down.

Everywhere were the scorched paths left by the powerful penetrative rays bearing dis, and here and there lay the blasted bodies of the black duck-footed men, the green Marsh-men who had fallen serving Nonur, or who had failed to get away before the fighting started. Among these was an occasional Red Robe, and many a foot reached out from the marching line to kick a Red Robe's dead body.

Entered at last, from the modern hand-cut rock tunnels into the smooth machine-cut vasty borings of the Elder Race, we passed along the gloomy grandeur of that long-gone race, past the mighty statues of those who were so much more than modern man, who lived when the Devil's Tower in Wyoming was a tree, who lived when Ygdrasil was living truth.

On into the more and more complex chambering of the ancient city that lay beneath Ekippe, on through the empty echoing corridors, seeking for some sign of Nonur's occupancy, seeking a flash of Red Robe fleeing in the distance we went,

knowing that along every corridor the avengers were spreading out, loosing sword from the scabbard, knowing she could not now escape us ever again. For Eltona had rendered every ray unworkable with her Elder magic and delivered our enemy into our hands, armed only with the primitive sword.

At last we saw them, throwing up a barricade, brandishing swords over the hastily erected piles of furnishings to bluff us into waiting while yet one more bench or chair was added to the pile.

Some of Nonur's duck-footed blacks had retained their primitive bows even though they had no opportunity to use them under her rule. From a half dozen of these, arrows shot out at us. They did not stop our advance one whit. There were but fifty or so men visible. I knew that they were busy erecting similar barricades along all the passages into the center of this place. I knew too that everywhere the Red Robes were working futilely over their ancient weapons. They would not understand, I did not believe, that they would never operate again until the last of them were dead.

We charged the barricade, swept over it. My blade tasted blood, and my own blood leaped within me in a fighting fury. I wished for my comrades, the Red men of the arena, and the thought added flame to the fury within me. I remembered my comrade dying the night I left with the Nameless maiden and Montagna.

The corridor was but wide enough for a score to meet face to face, and behind these we saw another barricade going up, and those behind the men we fought were retreating to gain this shelter.

I knew that Eltona's swift mind outside had analyzed the situation, was swiftly summoning warriors from every friendly city, that ships were even now descending upon the cities of the Red Men, lifting again loaded with hate for the Hagmen, that up every boring leading to Ekippe warriors would surge steadily until the last drop of that evil blood had been spilled upon the rock.

And I was afraid! I was afraid that I would not reach Nonur and the inner circle of Red Robes in time to wet this ancient, noble sword in the blood they had stolen.

OVER that first barricade we poured; the thin, worn Amazons of Tuon and

myself, proud to be fighting side by side with women. For the women of the Tuons are that kind of warriors.

Behind us lay the first swathe of the death we intended to cut through the Hagmen. Ahead lay barrier after barrier, and behind each the swords of Nonur's slaveys waved. But not confidently, not arrogantly; rather fearfully held before them, for our anger and our courage had slaughtered that first group so quickly that no man could see it without fear.

These Amazons, who had suffered every evil the followers of the blood-stealers could devise for some four centuries, who had been brought up in the shadow of fear and hate and horror of the Evil of the baby destroyers, of the parasitic Hagmen, always about them some reminder of the constant threat of their evil, now at last were advancing with equal terms, were presented with a chance to meet the Hagmen with only naked swords between.

On every face about me this fact was a shining expression of fierce, thankful ardor; was a thought of revenge suddenly made into actual occurrence. Their feet advanced toward the next barricade with a sound of grim unswerving doom, a kind of soft beating of flesh upon rock like no other sound. And the fear of that grim advance marked every face peering above the barricade.

THE arrows which had marked our first attack were missing now, and I knew there would be few enough of them. For with the ray-weapons always at hand, Nonur had not encouraged the primitive slaveys in their natural weapons, had used them only for labor. Now when she needed them, they had nothing, not even their natural skill with swords any longer in first rate shape.

We poured over the flimsy pile of furnishings, of tall bronze statues, of marble busts and wooden benches, and met the clumsy efforts of the mixed horde of slaves, of warriors from all the races of Venus, with a fury of blows, not so much skillful as invincible in our anger, in our intent to slay quickly and cleanse the planet. They shrieked as the swords passed into them, they bounded and struck at us fearfully and hopelessly—and they died! We marched on.

As we rounded a long curve in the corridor, I noticed a haze growing, growing. To

Ceulna I remarked:

"She must be laying down a smoke screen; perhaps she means to try to escape behind it!"

"We will be lucky if that haze is not some poisonous gas. She is from Earth, you know, where such weapons as gas are considered useful."

Admiringly I watched Ceulna's flushed, angry war-like face. The noble Grecian brow, the thin ears so stiffly arching, the wide upsweeping eyebrows, the deep, long sea-green eyes, the pink nostriled and narrow-bridged beauty of her nose, the nostrils palpitant with eagerness to reach her enemy. Truly, there is a something that war and the need for war breeds, that courage and the need to face death brings out in men and in such women as the Tuons, perhaps in any women raised for warfare as had these Tuons in their centuries of horrible conflict with the followers of Hecate and her methods which meant extinction for all normal living peoples. I think that is one of the failures of peace, that it does not properly stress the need for *need*, does not bring up a child in the understanding of the awful *need* for real and enthusiastic action against evil.

The smoke grew steadily thicker, and we were half choking with it, hardly able to see. I called a halt, and Onua backed me up as I counseled the need for some kind of caution. We had no everpresent telaug and penetrative ray to tell us what lay before, no way to know what trap Nonur was devising ahead in the complex warrens of the ancient tunnels. As we gathered in a group about Onua, taking some needed breathing space and discussing the layout of the tunnels with which we were unacquainted, I counseled that since the smoke would rise, we must go lower and so avoid it, come upon her from beneath.

Our column turned down a side passage, wound down and down, leaving just beneath the smoke layer a guard to watch for anyone attempting to pass back along the passage we had quietted. On the next tier of borings the smoke was less, and we took up our rapid march in toward the center of this tiered ancient city, as nearly as we could visualize its patterns.

I knew we were apt to become disunited with the other forces advancing upon the Hagmen, and even as I spoke to Onua she dispatched couriers to make contact with

the other columns of troops.

As they sped off, the floor began to trickle with a thin flowing film of water! For a minute I thought nothing of it, but it rapidly became inches deep, became an impeding force flowing along our ankles.

Ceulna said: "She has opened the water pipes, the antique water supply. It is disastrous. When the caverns fill no one will know how to empty them again. Where does she expect to be then?"

"Do those antique pipes bring a heavy supply? Will it take long to flood?"

"See how rapidly it rises! She has opened the great reserve reservoir as well. One cannot know how long it will take, but as sure as the sun arises in the morning, just as surely these caverns will never empty of water again!"

I did not dispute her. I said:

"I know little of how long it will take or how permanent the flood will be, but I know this, it were smart of us to seek the upper levels and block off the passages to the surface, there to await Nonur's flight. She will be forced out of here just as surely as ourselves!"

THE column turned, started back toward the surface. Rapidly, oh, too rapidly the water rose on our legs! More rapidly than rose the floor we passed along. The water raced past us in a flood, up to our knees, and now we had reached again the level of the smoke which somewhere Nonur had managed to create and fill the caverns. Choking, blinded with the smoke, stumbling along in the rapidly rising water, I realized that the plight of this column of brave Amazons was desperate. It was very likely we would never reach the surface ahead of the rising water. If we did, the smoke, now pungent and choking, could smother us if it grew thicker.

"We rushed in here without guides, Onua. We are apt to pay for our haste."

I should not have reproached her, for I knew the terrible hate of the Red Robes that had blinded her natural caution of her people.

Of numbers, or of possible tactics needed, I myself had given no thought at all. I had been sure that without the skill of the time-taught Red Robes at the ray-mech, my sword alone would be enough to slay them all, no matter how many or how disposed within the caves. I suppose some such



I began to slash at the heavy-timbered bars of the cages with pure brute force

thought had been in every mind: "Just let us at them without the rays that have always defended them from our wrath." Now, we were drowning and smothering both at once, or soon would be.

To top it, Ceulna had been swept away from my side in the milling, nearly panicking Amazons. To go forward seemed every moment more impossible in the rising waters and the thickening smoke.

"Take the first passage we can find that rises upward, go up in spite of smoke or flame, of Hagmen or death itself."

Onua was striding on, eyes closed, one hand on the rock wall to guide her. I followed. I could only hope that Ceulna would find her way, there was no use and no time to look for her in this murk.

We swung into a side passage of small bore that seemed to have a rising ceiling and hastened up the tunnel three abreast. There was no hope of all of us entering this passage. As the entrance jammed, the others of our column pushed on along the original passage.

I recognized the nature of the passage as it widened and I came upon a series of

stout wooden pens along the walls. These pens must underlay an arena, a huge ancient theatre circle which had been transformed into an arena of the bloody kind the Hagmen delighted in. Ahead I could see the glow of flames, understood that the Hagmen had set afire these pens to destroy the prisoners before release gave them a chance to vent their despair and rage upon their captors. That the smoke had proved a weapon was probably only accidental, but the flames barred our progress upward into the great theater bowl where it was possible the Red Robes had gathered their strength for a stand.

Behind us the water lapped higher and higher. Behind us the ceiling, rose steeply out of the water. Where we had just passed was now closed, all below were drowned. I knew that everyone who had not entered that small passage after Onua must now be drowned in the lower, greater passage. Anxiously I looked about among the hundred or six score who had made their way behind Onua and myself. My heart fell as I saw nowhere the bright head and gallant shoulders of my beloved Amazon. Was I to



lose her now when victory loomed so very close? Had I lost her?

RAGE flooded up within me even as the rising water behind. I drew the great sword of the Marsh-men from my scabbard, strode forward into the flame-lit wooden-walled corridors of the prison pens. I knew what it would be like to be shut up in there with the flames licking at your body, meant to free some of the wretches I realized must be within. The flames shot up, the water lapped at my heels, I saw or heard nothing, for a killing mad rage consumed me, a sorrow at the loss of Ceulna that was more terrible than burning anger at the fact that Nonur had managed to hurt me even now.

As I pushed on, bending low under the smoke pall, shielding my face against the darting, licking flames, screams and cries and groans began to beat about me. I saw the pens were filled with struggling, burning men ahead. The doors were locked.

I began to slash at the heavy timbered bars of the cages, prying out one more by strength than by the cutting edge of my blade, racing on to the next as the sur-

vivors poured out. Soon there were dozens of us dodging the flames, which kept high, our lungs burning with smoke, prying at the bars with timbers, battering at the locks with weapons from the arena supplies, working to free the dying men inside. The work was a blessed relief to my mind again assailed by the loss of Ceulna.

The water at our feet proved our salvation, as well as that of the smothering men inside. As it rose about our ankles, we wet garments in the water, wrapped them about our heads and shoulders. Soon there were hundreds of the arena warriors, scarred and battered from past battles in the arena, passing on ahead and out into the great bowl of the arena below Ekippe.

As the last of them was free I pushed on ahead, was among the first to enter the wide, white-sanded bowl of the arena into the glare of the great sun-lamps hanging above. The shape of this arena differed from that under Nicosthene, being a regular octagon instead of the smooth circle, and the tiers of seats were more numerous. I saw a robe of Scarlet and Gold disappearing in a side passage from the ramp running up

between two tiers of seats, sprang after him. Behind me came a rabble of Red warriors, green Marsh-men, black duck-footed slaves, and after them came the disciplined column, all that was left of the long column of thousands that had entered the central passage behind Onua. I could not bear to think of how many must have perished. I pushed on as fast as I could run, hoping only to slay one of these red-robed things before I died.

I overtook him, cut him down with one savage blow from behind. As I stood over the nearly beheaded figure, I saw it was the heavy-bodied Massini who had captured me on my escape to Eltona's castle in the jungle.

Ahead I heard the clangor of swords, the shrieks of dying men. I raced on, swung around the bend of the corridor, saw the great doors of some Master chamber of the past. Before the wide-arched doorway were a mass of struggling warriors. Red Robes sprinkled among the Redskins, and the Marsh-men before the doorway. It was evident the Hagmen were trying to hold the interior clear of us for some reason.

I LEAPED toward the battle, whirling that heavy Marsh-man sword above my head. My face blackened with smoke, my limbs burned in patches from the flames, I doubt my own Ceulna would have recognized me. My sword began to slash a path through the struggling mass before the door. A red haze in my mind swept me on. It was swing and crush, no chance in the press for anything fancy. The battle went to the strongest here. And I proved the strongest, for they fell away before me. I was through and into the great glittering vault, pillared with rosy glistening columns of some ancient work, vaulted and bright with concealed lights. In the center of the great chamber was a vast crystal door. Before the door were a score of Scarlet and Gold robes, and among the devils I saw the bare shoulders of Nonur, her body sheathed in that glittering metal mesh, her face writhing with frustration. I saw that that door represented escape by the way they paused before it, the way they looked at it. Beside Nonur I saw several other women, among them, strangely and impossibly, several Tuons bound.

I sprang across the smooth, moist floor. Already the flood was creeping in, even

here. I slipped, went to one knee, got up, crashed up the steps, sending the heavy-bodied Red Robes sprawling. I stood a half-dozen feet from Nonur, and a dozen swords reached for my life. I crashed my blade down upon them, whirled it aloft. Behind me the horde of prisoners from the arena pens poured in, screaming, bellowing their anger and their exultation at sight of Nonur.

We ringed that group with steel, and sparks flew like rain as edge met edge, as stroke met stroke. Savage, swarming death loosed at last upon those who had meted out death to all but their favorites for so long on Venus. Death to those who had raped every city, every hamlet, of children at some time, who had preyed upon the people of Venus as wolves upon sheep.

And we had her! She looked back at me, with a strange *waiting* puzzling to me upon her face. And then I saw what she waited for! I knew what that doorway was, and I shouted with sudden fear that she would yet escape us. That door was to one of the strange dream-mechs of the ancients!

They were built to serve the weary, the escapist of their complex ancient life, and they were built to exclude him from the world, to save him from all possible contact with the realities of life FOR SO LONG A PERIOD AS HE SHOULD SET THE TIMELOCK!

Nonur knew that no human power could enter one of those monstrous machines once they were shut and locked. The time lock operates from the inside. Ponderously the great crystalline outer door swung open, Nonur and a score of her followers, as well as the bound captives, pushed through after her. The great door swung shut in our faces. I stood there, among a hundred men as baffled as myself. On the other side of the crystal wall of the doorway, Nonur laughed at me evilly, triumphantly, and pointed to the prisoner who stood beside her, her arms wound with the white plastic cords of the ancient make. I had not noticed these captives except that they were Tuons, did not realize that by some passage some of our own attack force had won to Nonur and been captured. The face of the one Nonur pointed out to me was Ceulna! lovely Ceulna!

Ceulna, locked in the time-lock dream-mech with Nonur and a score of the Hagmen!

BEHIND me I could hear Onua, knew she had pushed on, stood now beside me.

"She has but put off her fate. We will await her emergence though it take a century."

I moaned. I gnashed my teeth unconsciously.

"How long was it set for? Onua, tell me more of the nature of what lies beyond. Why can't we break in and set her free?"

"They built imperishably, Jim Steel. And they built those dream-palaces in which to retire and be undisturbed. And when they meant undisturbed they meant *undisturbed!* No power on Venus today could break into that impervious, circling round-of-dreams."

I pushed my face against the crystal outer door, to see within what might yet be a glimpse of my beloved Ceulna, my warrior maid of Venus.

The great metal inner door, composed of layer on layer of interlocking alloy, those alloys no modern tool will even scratch, was swinging slowly shut in answer to some mechanism within so protected by the insulative ray-impervious walls that the magnetic field of ray-neutralizing force laid down by Eltona affected it not at all! Six inches of space left by the slowly closing massive metal, and just behind I saw Ceulna's lovely face, peering to catch a last glimpse of myself. Behind, Nonur peered, triumphant to see us frustrated of vengeance in the end. Seeing our love passing thus between us, poignant at the separation closing between us. Nonur's face assumed a sudden, diabolical, wickedly joyful expression. She whipped a knife from her girdle, pressed it to Ceulna's throat. As the door closed between us, I saw the knife flash in sudden slashing motion. Did I see the blood spurt from her white throat? Had Nonur only done it to leave me in torment, timing her motion so that it would appear to me she had slain Ceulna? Or had she done it so that my last sight of her would be of her slaying my own Ceulna? I could not know; the sight was not clear. I seized

Onua. My grasp hurt her; she winced.

"Did you see? Did she kill her?"

"No one could see for sure, Steel. I could not make out whether she made a pretense of the killing or did so in truth."

"Onua, when *will* the door open? When can we enter? We will get Eltona and blast that place apart piece by piece."

"No one can enter there, Steel, until the time has passed. Not even Eltona! Everyone who knows anything of the Elder race-customs will know that. Those devices were built to give them an inviolable place to retire from this dull world into a world of their own, furnished entirely by visions from the dream machines within. We can only wait and hope, and keep the magnetic block-rays on so that she can not send a rays out to see whether we still wait or not."

"They have no food! They had not time to gather supplies!"

"We don't even know that, Jim. They may be forced to emerge in weeks, and they may not come out of there for years! We can only wait and hope."

I turned away, my head bowed. Like a sick man, I could not bear more of the continual frustration of my hopes for a life of some happiness, a natural human life.

Suddenly something broke within me, and I turned again; flung myself at that gleaming inscrutable plastic doorway which had shut me off from all happiness. I tore at it with my bare hands, fell and got up again. Mouthing curses, I clawed at the barrier between me and my only true love.

They picked me up, struggling and beating at them fiercely. They bore me away. I have never asked what happened that day. Nor does anyone intrude or call to mind what we who wait here under Ekippe may find when at last the inscrutable mechanism of the Elder retreat opens.

Only *time* will tell whether Nonur's dagger pierced that throat or only left me with the tormenting vision of a thing that seemed to be. And only time will deliver Nonur into my hands at last!

But, inevitably, that time will come, and I will be here!

DON'T MISS THE SEQUEL TO "GODS OF VENUS"

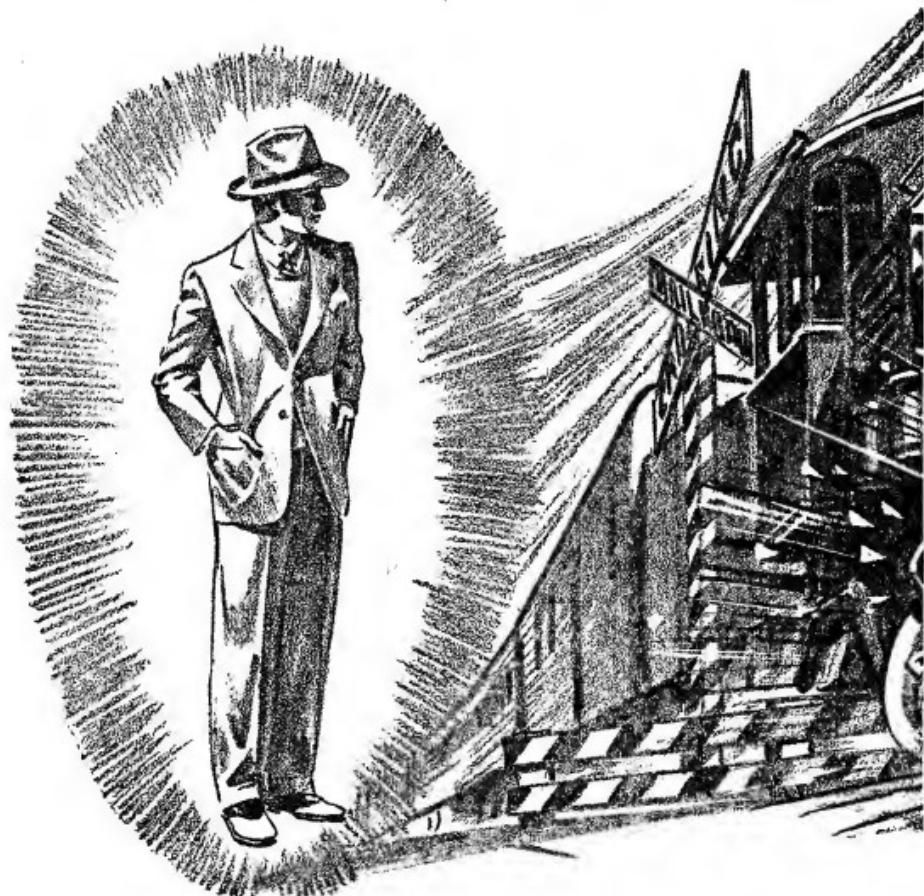
"TITAN'S DAUGHTER"

COMING SOON IN AMAZING STORIES

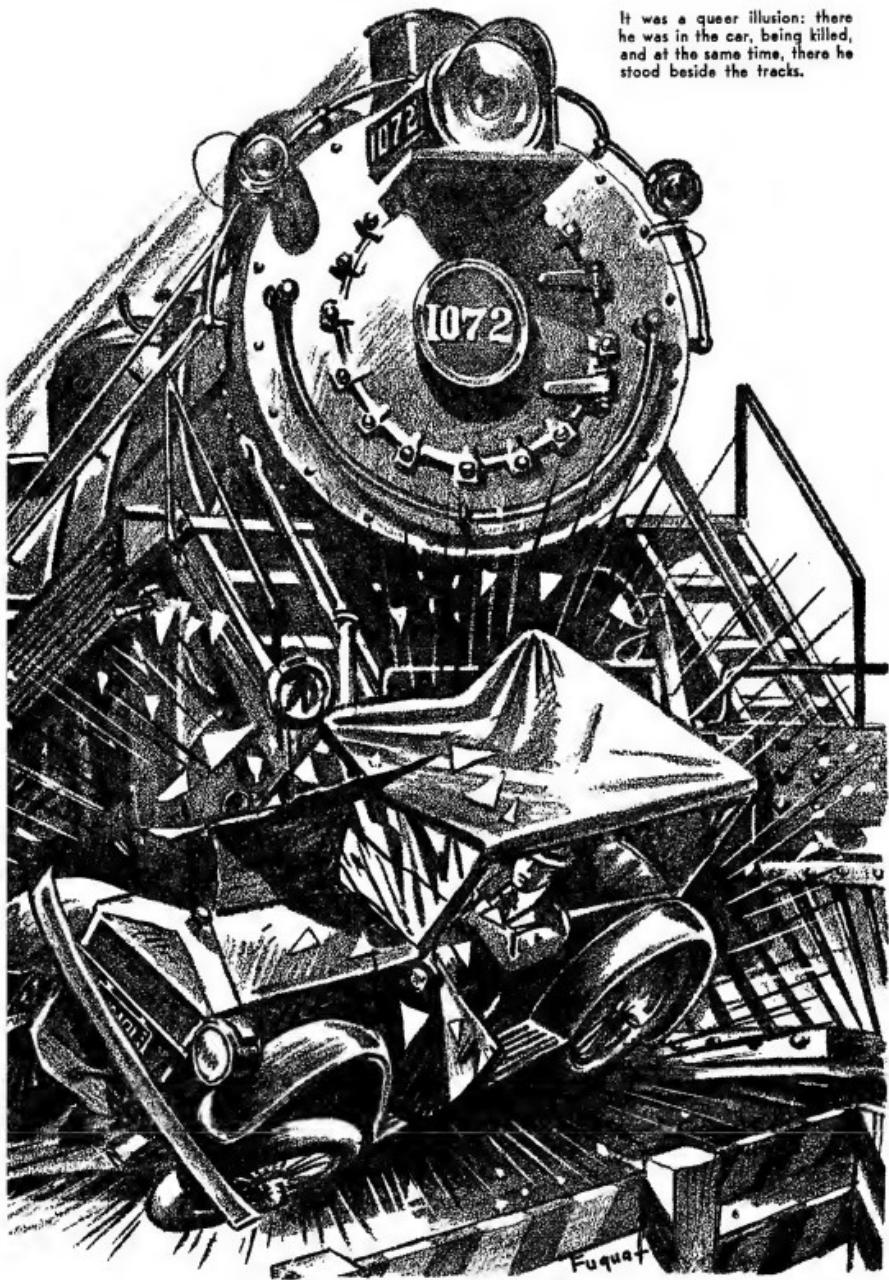
The EGG of TIME

by MILLEN COOKE

Edmund Latimer had a queer power. He could control Time. It was, he said, because we all live in our own little eggshell and Time only exists for us — if we knew it!



It was a queer illusion: there he was in the car, being killed, and at the same time, there he stood beside the tracks.



Fuqua

IN THE one thousand, nine hundred and forty-seventh year of the old calendar, Edmund Latimer had no idea of his destiny. He dreamed, certainly, but his dreams were concerned with other and more nebulous ideas than his becoming a great man and changing whole civilizations with his discoveries and inventions. A year or two before he hit upon the principle of fire, he passed his eighteenth birthday very quietly, half buried in the top of a straw-stack. Here he had stretched himself in luxurious isolation.

His body was engaged in the somewhat complicated process of vigorously assimilating an extra-large supply of unusual delicacies. In honor of her offspring's successful establishment of an independent existence upon the planet, Edmund's adoring mother had taxed her kitchen to the limit of its store. Now, his stomach occupied itself with its own affairs, and Edmund's mind went wandering, as it usually did anyway, somewhere in the realms of "thinking beyond thought," naked, wild, and free.

This habit of his mind both soothed and fascinated Edmund. Almost anything could induce the happy state, which, his relatives declared, made him resemble a chicken with its nose on a chalk line. On this occasion it was undoubtedly the food, plus the blue, clear sky that stretched changeless and eternal-looking above his resting place. All that, and the fact of his birthday, for Edmund began to think, in that way he had, about Time.

"Time," said Edmund to himself, "is a darned funny thing." And he was off. Three hours later when his father called him down to help get the stock into the barn he was still moving dimly through the haze of his ideas.

"Pa," he said meditatively, lapping his elbows over the side of a box stall, "can you remember all your life?"

Pa Latimer was trained and seasoned in dealing with questions of this sort from Edmund. He replied very quietly, "Why, of course, son."

"Then tell me what happened on this day, say twenty-five years ago," Edmund demanded.

Mr. Latimer thought for a minute. "Now let me see. That was the year we left Topeka, and . . . No, it wasn't, either. It was the next year, and on this day . . ." He looked at Edmund's serious, expectant

face, and swore. Edmund didn't turn a hair, but his expression became more sad than serious: "Can't you remember, Pa?"

"NO!" Latimer thundered, "and furthermore there's no man alive that could remember a thing like that unless it was something extraordinary and important."

"I can remember that day," said Edmund simply, and walked out of the barn.

For a second or two Pa Latimer stood stunned, not quite believing his own ears. Then he roared, "Edmund Latimer, come back in here!"

Edmund came back and stood in obedient, if questioning, silence before his father.

"I don't know what to say to you, son," Latimer began, "but if I heard what you said, you as much as told me that you could remember something that happened twenty-five years ago."

"That's right, Pa," said Edmund gently, recalling what the scriptures have to say about soft answers.

Pa Latimer's voice was slow and edged with an infinite sarcasm: "I beg your pardon, boy, but how old do you say you are?"

Edmund began to come out of his dream, then, and to see the trap he had walked into, but it was obviously too late to back out, so he clung to his previous statement. "I can remember, I said," and that was all he said.

He shut up his mouth like the door of an iron safe, and probably shut up his ears, too along with it. Certainly the many thoughts his father found it necessary to share with him upon the subject of veracity among the Latimers made little or no impression upon Edmund. In the end when his father said, "Now what do you say for yourself? What did you mean by saying a fool thing like that?" Edmund merely said, very weakly, "Why nothing, Pa, only I just know that on this day twenty-five years ago your Pa offered to whale the tar out of you for . . ."

"Ed!" Mr. Latimer interrupted, scandalized, "Pa never offered to lay a hand on any one of his sons—except the time that—Say! Who let that out and told you?"

"Nobody. I just remembered, Pa."

Fear and fury rolled up like a great cloud inside Pa Latimer. "Eddie Latimer, if your Ma has . . ."

Eddie was quick to the defense. "Oh

no, Ma never said anything to me." Then, more quietly, as if there was no other explanation—which there wasn't: "I just remembered, that's all."

The great cloud lifted, but it left a grumbling. "Looks like you could have remembered something else," the elder Latimer growled, but Eddie was already far away again, and the incident died there—or at least it was scotched for the time being.

THE next Tuesday, Edmund Latimer disappeared. Nothing was heard of or from him for three whole days.

"The boy's run off," Ma said, wiping back her tears, "and I don't know that I blame him for it, either. I heard you raise your voice in wrath against him down there in the barn the other evening. He's sensitive, Pa, and he's taken it all to heart and run off." She put her head down on the table and sobbed despairingly. Mr. Latimer looked miserable, and went over in his mind again all the justifications he had devised to make his treatment of Edmund upon that occasion seem reasonable to Ma. It didn't work, so he banged out of the house and started down the path toward the barn. Right in the middle of the path, he met Edmund.

Edmund was walking along with his head down, thinking, and Mr. Latimer very nearly bumped into him before either of them could stop. The odd thing was that it was still broad daylight. Edmund simply hadn't been there, and then, all at once, there he was, ambling along in that dreamy way of his, not two feet from his Pa. It was so disconcerting that Pa Latimer had no time to recall anything about the traditional or recommended treatment of returning prodigals. He just stepped aside out of the path, and Edmund walked on toward the house, just as if he hadn't seen his father at all. In a moment or two there were cries of joy from the kitchen, and with a weary sigh Pa Latimer turned back toward the house. "Might as well see if I can find out what it's all about," he muttered.

But there was no finding out. When subjected to questioning, Edmund was very unclear about the whole affair.

"Where have you been these three days?" his Ma demanded.

"Why Ma, you know where I've been!" Edmund was surprised. He began to give

an account of his doings, and it was letter-perfect—except for the fact that he began it six days back instead of three, and when he came to the end of it, there were the last three days still unaccounted for.

"Eddie," his father tried again, "we want to know what happened during these last three days."

Edmund was genuinely puzzled. "But Pa," he said, "I just told you . . ."

Pa and Ma Latimer looked at one another over the head of their bewildered and bewildering son, and Ma said: "Amnesia."

So they bundled him off to a doctor in town—a very young doctor who was full of all the latest ideas and the newest names for what ailed people. He got a little farther with Edmund than the Latimers had, but not much.

"Tell me, Edmund," he began in a confidential tone, "what were you doing *just* before you came back to the house?"

"Walking," Edmund replied without hesitation.

The Latimers beamed at one another. It took a scientific training to learn how to ask the right questions.

"Walking where?" urged the Doctor.

Edmund became a little impatient under this grilling.

"Just walking. Down in the woodlot, and then out across the pasture, and then back to the house. Oh, and I sat in the straw-stack for a half an hour or so."

"Is that all, Edmund?" the Doctor probed.

"Sure," Edmund replied. His expression said: What the heck is all this about?

Little beads of perspiration hung like dew upon the Doctor's forehead. He played his ace. "How long do you think you were gone, Edmund?" he asked.

Edmund frowned and puzzled for a minute. "I can't tell," he said, "I didn't take my watch, and if I had I probably wouldn't have looked at it. You see, I was thinking, and when I'm thinking . . ."

The Doctor waved a hand. "Yes, yes, Edmund, we know," he said quickly, "but can you make a guess? About how long do you think you were away?"

Edmund thought hard again. Then he was definite. "Three hours," he said. "I came back because I thought it must be about time to help get in the stock."

The Doctor, and Ma, and Pa Latimer all let their breaths out at once, and Ed-



Edmund walked off down
the lane — and dis-
appeared for three days ...

mund looked pleased with himself as though he had got the right answer at last. Almost immediately he lapsed into more interesting thoughts. Almost immediately the Doctor yanked him out of them again.

"Do you want to know how long you really were gone?" he asked Edmund.

Edmund blinked.

"You were gone," continued the Doctor, as Edmund made no other reply, "three days." The Doctor underlined his words with heavy emphasis. The change in Edmund was electric! He sat up so quickly that the others drew back involuntarily, as people do who have been startled by a jack-in-the-box.

"Three days!" he exclaimed. "Gosh! I must have slowed myself up!"

AND that was the end and all they could get out of him about the matter. They took him home where he appeared to be his normal self again. That is, he went about his duties, thinking furiously, saying little, and tinkering to all hours in the little hen-house he had converted into a workshop.

Nearly a month went by, serenely. Then one morning Edmund was observed backing his Ford up to the workshop door. He crept underneath it with something small and mechanical, which he attached somewhere under the body. Then he crawled out again, drove the Ford into the yard, loaded it up with the various things that were to be taken to town, and with a wave of his arm, was off down the lane in a cloud of dust.

"Humph!" Pa Latimer grunted from his seat on the back porch. "What kind of a gadget do you suppose he's hooked up to it now?"

"Hard to tell, Pa," sighed Mrs. Latimer. They both hoped it would work better than the gas-saver he had tried out on the previous automobile. Pa still wore a couple of souvenirs, in scar-tissue, collected from vagrant bits of flying glass and metal that resulted from that experiment. Since that unhappy day there had been a firm agreement in the family that Edmund's gadgets were to be tried out *only* when other members of the tribe were accounted for and able to maintain a comfortable distance.

LEROY TAPPER, the neighbor's boy, brought Edmund home about an hour

later. He said he'd seen the whole thing, just as it happened. There was a railroad crossing about two miles from the Latimer farm. It was an ordinary grade, crossing, but the road ran along parallel with the tracks for about half a mile before it suddenly swung to the left at a right angle and crossed them. This made a bad corner, in a way, but it did force people coming toward town to slow down before they dashed across the tracks. Even so, there was hardly any excuse for being hit there, since the railway was plainly visible for more than a mile either way.

Leroy said he wasn't more than a quarter of a mile behind Edmund when he turned into the straight stretch of road that ran along beside the tracks. He saw a train coming. It was a long one, and he knew Edmund would have to wait for it, so he stepped on the gas.

"Thought I'd speed up and catch him at the crossing," he said, "and say hello."

He saw Edmund in the Ford coming nearer and nearer to the corner and the crossing. He saw the train pounding along toward the same spot. He calculated, and then, horrified, he yelled.

"I knew it wouldn't do a bit of good," he said, "but I couldn't help it. I had to yell. The darned fool never even slowed up for the corner. He just whizzed around it and right out in front of the train. The engineer saw him at the last second and must have pulled the whistle-cord out by the roots. I saw the cow-catcher hit the Ford in the middle, and all sorts of things went up in the air. Then I got sick."

As soon as he had regained command of himself, Leroy drove up to the crossing. The train had pulled clear of the road and stopped. The excited crew were busy picking vegetables and bits of wreckage of the locomotive, and running back along the train toward the crossing. When he, too, reached the crossing, Leroy got his second shock. He had steeled himself to discover Edmund in bits and pieces, and had already made up his mind to the horrid task that lay ahead.

But no. There, on the far side of the tracks, in the middle of the dusty road, stood Edmund, without a scratch on him. His expression was that of a man confronted with an insoluble problem, faced with the sudden defection of a natural law, deserted by fact, and left without any sort of explanation for events and circum-

stances.

"He's dazed!" said a brakeman.

"No, he's just Edmund," said Leroy. Then the enormity of it all hit him, and he sat down on a rail and cried like a baby.

LATER, after the conductor had written everything down, and they had picked up what could be salvaged from the remains of Edmund's load, they put everything into Leroy's truck and started back toward the Latimer place.

"Tell me, Edmund," queried Leroy, "what made you do it? Didn't you see the train?"

"Sure I saw the train," Edmund answered, "but the thing didn't work."

"What thing?"

"The thing I made to speed up the car." Edmund's voice was muffled. He was already far away in thought. They drove on for a little while in silence, then Edmund fairly exploded:

"Gosh! I speeded up, didn't I?" and he beamed upon Leroy. "It worked for me, but it didn't work for the Ford. Now why do you suppose . . ." He lapsed again into a silence that he had not broken. Leroy said, "I don't know what you're talking about," and brought him home.

Ma Latimer looked at Pa, and they sighed. "It's all right, Leroy," Pa said. "We know what he meant, I guess . . ." He turned to Edmund, "Or do we now? Eddie!"

Edmund came out of his trance. "Yes, Pa?"

"Talk!" Mr. Latimer commanded.

Edmund tried to find words. "It's like this, Pa," he began, "there's a little thing in your brain—or somewhere up there—at least it seems to be in your head. You can feel it working when it works, and when it doesn't work you can't feel it. It makes things look like a kind of brightness is all over them. When it works you can remember things, sometimes even things that have happened to other people. If it gets going hard enough in a certain direction, then things happen to you that don't happen to other people. Like me, getting lost, for example. That time I got it going the wrong way, and slowed myself up."

"Wait a minute," Leroy cut in, "do you mean to say you can tinker with time?"

Edmund wasn't sure. "I don't know, Leroy," he said. "I don't think it's tinkering, as you say, so much as it's just find-

ing out what makes time and how to get around in it. Look," he continued with sudden inspiration, "it's like living in an egg."

At this point Pa Latimer got up and walked away without another word. There was a limit to his understanding, and a limit to what he could stand. Edmund had reached both with that remark, but Ma nodded her head, and Leroy said, "Go on, Ed."

"Everybody," Edmund went on, "lives in a little egg of time that's all his own. Everything does, for that matter, but what its time will be like depends on what it's made of. Things like stones and iron and dead wood can't control what goes on inside that egg. Only living things can do that, and human beings can do it best of all because they have that little thing in their heads to do it with."

"I don't know where he gets it!" Ma exclaimed. She was fascinated. She didn't understand a bit of it, but she loved to hear Eddie talk.

"You mean," Leroy said, "that you can lengthen and shorten your hours and minutes, if you want to?"

"Sure."

Leroy snorted: "I don't believe it!"

Edmund smiled. Then he said, "Ma, where's my watch?" The watch was tracked down verbally, and finally brought out of its retirement in the pocket of a pair of blue-jeans in the washhouse. Edmund held it up in front of Leroy's nose.

"You know this watch?"

"Naturally," replied Leroy.

"All right," Edmund laid down the rules. "You hold it with yours until you're satisfied they're running at the same rate."

Leroy shook his head. "We don't have to do that, Edmund," he said. "I know that watch is perfect. They could set the courthouse clock by it if they wanted to."

Edmund thrust the watch into his pocket and sat down again on the step. He held his hands out where it could be seen that he wasn't touching the watch in any way.

"I'm going to sit here for fifteen minutes by your watch," he announced. "Do you want me to sit slow or fast?"

"What?" cried Ma Latimer in astonishment.

"I get it," said Leroy. "You sit fast, Edmund, and I'll time you."

So they all sat still for fifteen minutes by Leroy's watch. Nothing happened, ap-

parently. Edmund didn't seem to change, although Ma Latimer said, after a while, that it seemed to her Edmund was breathing more rapidly than usual. In fifteen minutes to the dot Leroy called "Time," and Edmund got to his feet. He walked over to Ma Latimer and said, "You fish the watch out, Ma, I don't want to touch it."

Ma took the watch out of his pocket and they all compared it with Leroy's.

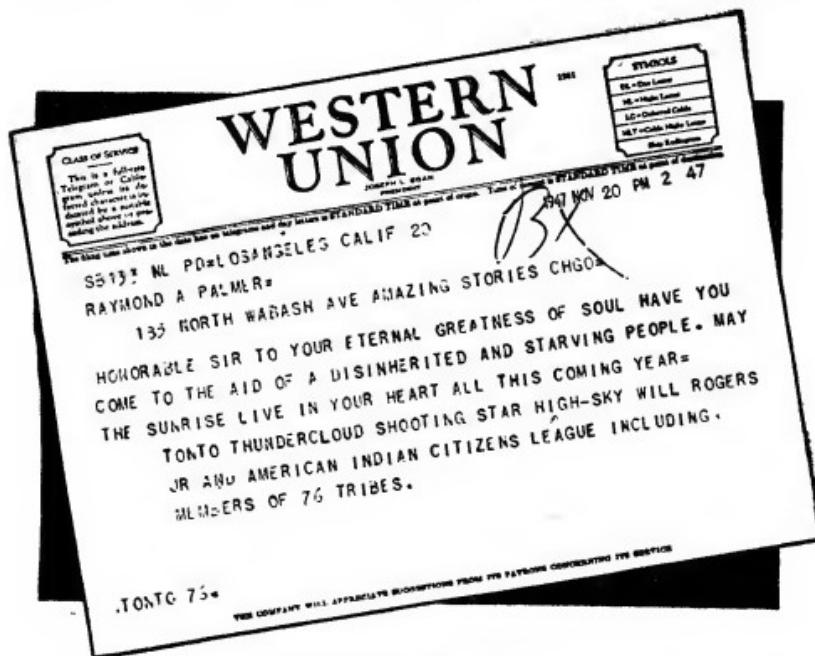
"It's a miracle!" Ma Latimer exclaimed. Leroy's watch had run fifteen minutes, while Edmund's had run a half-hour.

"Shall I sit slow for you now, Leroy?"

Edmund asked, a little eagerly. This was fun, and a fine chance to show off his abilities to an appreciative audience. Leroy, however, suddenly remembered that he had to get to town or get home, one or the other, and appeared to be in a great hurry to get out into the lane.

"Now what do you suppose got into him all at once?" Ma said, and went into the kitchen to see about dinner.

Edmund sat on the porch, and sat slow for a long time, just for the fun of it, but he was careful not to lose track of himself again. There had, he figured, been enough excitement for one day.



LET US GIVE THANKS!

THE above telegram is our prized possession. It demonstrates how successful was the campaign we instituted with "The Fire Trail," by Oge Make, and "Plight Of The Navaho" in the January issues of all the Ziff-Davis Fiction Group. We scooped every news source in the country, including *Time* by at least a week.

Most satisfactory, of course, is the immense success of our plea for aid. There will be no starving Navajo this winter! Or any other winter. Americans, and especially readers of this magazine, can be proud of what they have achieved!

In a matter of weeks, the plight of the Navajo became top news. Radio stations broadcast our plea, newspapers ran the story, *Time* ran it a week later, *Harpers* ran an article, *Fortune* took up the fight, American Legion commanders took local action, Hollywood stars formed a relief movement, Walter Winchell broadcast a plea, and, best of all, Washington's Social Security Board ordered New Mexico and Arizona Social Security agencies to accept 11,000 Indian cases or face the loss of \$7,000,000 federal funds. They provided 2 millions!

Americans, we are proud of you!



EVERYTHING... BUT THE SINK

by Berkeley Livingston

"AND how was everything at the office yesterday?" Gao Sanro lifted his eyes from the *Gawoo News* and bent a slow and completely suspicious look at his wife. Sanro didn't like the tone of his wife's voice. Not one bit, he didn't! What was more, if he knew his wife, and Sanro knew her a great deal better than most men ever get to know their wives, she didn't ask questions like that unless . . . He cleared his throat and said:

"Oh . . . 'bout the same as the day before. Why?"

She turned her head aside as she poured the stimulating offecay into his cup.

"Nothing. Just that I called. And you weren't in . . ."

Sanro slammed his paper to the table in high dudgeon. There was no *low* dudgeon on Asmadasma, the planet on which Sanro and his wife lived.

"I wasn't in!" his voice held a rich tone of scorn. "And that is supposed to mean



All four fists began flying . . .
she certainly was in a rage!

**Gao Sanro was a gay blade — or so he
thought. When his wife found out what he
was up to — brother! Anyway, crockery be-
gan flying, even into the fourth dimension!**

something, isn't it?"

"Only that you weren't in," she said easily, while she poured some offecay for herself.

"Must we play these games at *every* breakfast?" Sanro asked wearily. "Can't you think of the simple answer that I might have had some business engagement?"

"I could and probably did," she said, looking him straight in the eyes. "Then I remembered yesterday was holiday. Something *you* forgot to remember. Holiday

means all business closes . . ."

But Gao Sanro had a mind that operated efficiently in emergencies. It was obvious this was an emergency. Certainly it wouldn't do to tell the truth. That he and that very lovely new secretary he had hired had taken an excursion trip out to . . . He stopped thinking about it. He drooled at the thought of what had happened.

"Precisely why I went down," he said. "I had made arrangements to meet Ishkay Morhashphy, the importer of the Onnus-

Bird Feathers, and I forgot. So I called him and we met at the pavilion on Overlay Island. I'm pleased to say our conference turned out very well. Matter of fact I managed to get enough feathers out of Ishkay to feather that dress you wanted . . ."

Forgotten were her suspicions of her husband at the mention of the fabled and terribly hard to get Osmus-Bird feathers. Why only last week Mrs. Ocsabot had slyly told, the mean old fitch, about how she was getting a dress with a collar made of the feathers. Hoho! That old fitch! Now she'll keep that yap closed . . .

Mrs. Sanro sped around the table and planted a kiss on her husband's lips. He hastily sucked his plate back in—she sometimes forgot the suction of her lips—and smiled at her.

"You darling!" she crowed. "You old, old, darling!"

That was odd, Sanro thought. The girl had used exactly the same expression yesterday when he had given her the gift of a jacket. This time he let the thought of her stay in his mind. He rose, dusted his lips daintily with the napkin and stretched to his full nine hundred and fifty feet. His waistcoat slipped above the waistband of his trousers and though he pulled it down immediately it still showed a few feet of white shirting. Better stop off and look at that new girdle they were showing for men. Gettin' too much gut lately, Sanro thought abstractedly as he made for the hall . . .

His wife also rose and looked after the departing husband with an expression which was half admiration, half distaste. He was such a—she searched for a word and found it—he was such a pouter of a man, a little man. For Mrs. Sanro was a full twenty-five feet taller than her husband. He was quite short. Men averaged twelve hundred feet on Asmadsama. She knew why she had married him, all right. He was an excellent provider. And when she buttered him right, as she could do on occasion, he was most bountiful.

The door closing announced his departure. Mrs. Sanro sighed and made for the kitchen, her mind on the dress she was to get.

She hummed an accompaniment to the music coming from the oivid set as she washed the dishes and stacked them in or-

der on the sink. Then drawing another cup of offecay she sat down to the day's news and the society column. Suddenly her eyes found the day's suggestion for the housewifely cook. A new kind of cake which used only eighty pounds of ragus . . . H'm. Might as well see how it comes out. Mrs. Sanro loved cake.

Mrs. Sanro got all the ingredients ready, got the mixing bowl off one of the shelves and plugged it in. She shrieked in fear as sparks shot from the connection. There was a vivid flash of light, a crisp odor of something burning, and all the lights went out in the kitchen. Mrs. Sanro used expressions quite unladylike and ran for the enoph.

* * * *

"**W**ELL," said the repairman, as he did something to one of the wires he had laid bare, "I guess you did it, lady. Gonna have to take this phase off the gravity-dimensiono belt . . ."

"Is that good or bad?" Mrs. Sanro asked fearfully. She knew nothing whatever about these things. Even less than her husband who couldn't nail something without getting the hammer mixed up with his thumb.

"Ain't good, that's for sure," he said. "Lucky you didn't blow the whole circuit. You might have gone into the third dimension somewhere. Maybe landed on some planet we read about . . . Oh, it'll be an inconvenience for the next two days. You won't be able to cook, for one thing. But you will have lights. I rigged an emergency outlet. That'll hold till we get this fixed up. But let me warn you, lady. Don't throw things! The gravity-dimensiono belt is off and whatever you throw will simply disappear . . ."

She shook her head as though she understood. There *had* been something in the papers about someone who had thrown a baby when the belt was off.

"But what'll I do?" she wailed.

He shrugged his shoulder and said:

"See an eivom. Or better, go to Overlay Island . . ."

She brightened at that. Of course. Why not? The pavilion was lots of fun.

He continued:

"Lots of ladies go there. They got a couple shows an' shops. Besides, you were



There was something very much like a hurricane in the lady's eyes . . .

gonna make a cake. They got the best bake shop on the island you ever saw."

Mrs. Sanro looked at the time. H'm. If she hurried she could meet her husband for lunch and spend the rest of the day on the island . . .

* * * *

SHE has such nice arms, Mr. Sanro thought. And those hands! Aah! Two of them were caressing his balding head while the other two played with his ears. They certainly weren't like his wife's hands or arms. Those resembled tree trunks . . . He sighed gently as she continued to ruffle the thin locks.

"Does mah li'l ole daddikin's love his li'l ole honeylambkins?" she cooed in a southern accent. She came from the South, South Asmadasma.

"A co'se ab does," he began. He straightened up suddenly and continued in a more natural voice. "Of course, Miss Zsymysphryx I think we've gone into that before . . ." He suddenly wished she had a more pronounceable name. "Er. Suppose

we, er, well, it's so beastly warm in the office. Shall we go to Uverlay Island? It'll be cooler there."

She cooed:

"Mistuh Sanro, you uttahly charmin' man! How did you-all know I been wantin' to go theah?"

Sanro heaved another sigh. Ishkay certainly knew how to pick them. This one was the best Ishkay had ever sent him. A jewel of a secretary she was. A bit on the expensive side. Still . . .

"Very well then," he said. "Now suppose we get that correspondence off? By that time it should be the lunch hour . . ."

"Lunch houah?" she trilled sadly and delightfully.

He knew what she meant. "Figuratively speaking, my dear," he made haste to say. "Of course we won't worry about the time."

She kissed him quickly as she slid off his lap and found her seat by his side. She was the prim Miss Zsymysphryx, the perfect secretary, as she waited for his dictation. . .

* * * *

MISS GLAPHAS OCSABOT walked with an odd quiver to her posterior. She looked as though she could never quite make it through a swinging door unless she did it sideways. Her breath came in quick panting gasps as she stepped smartly along toward that simply wonderful bake shop on the Pavilion. But her thoughts were not on pastries.

That poor Mrs. Sanro, she thought. Such a shame, too. Those simply silly clothes she wore. And always thinking she was the best-dressed woman in the block. H'm! Why she looked like an old fright in those perfectly ridiculous clothes she bought. And that utterly silly man of hers! Why everyone knew he was just an old roué. Why he'd even made a pass, the thought made the blood rise to her cheeks, at her. Oh, she was quite sure of it. Well, he wasn't so old anyway. It was probably living with that woman that made him look that way.

And suddenly Miss Oscabot stopped dead in her tracks.

Her eyes widened in surprise. For a second she didn't know whether her eyes had deceived her or not. Then she was sure. It was Mr. Sanro. And with a . . . a . . . well, there was only the word for it, hussy. Surely that hair wasn't hers by nature. Miss Oscabot found a dooryard and peered around its edge. Aah! The two of them had gone into that cafe . . . A bright smile lifted the sour veil from her lips. This was going to be a dish she was going to enjoy eating over and over again.

She waited until the door closed on the two before moving from the shelter of the doorway. Then she didn't go to the cafe. Instead she found an open enohp booth. As she dialed a number, her teeth gleamed blackly in a smile.

"Hello, hello," she called into the mouth-piece. "Mrs. Sanro . . . ? This is a friend. I have just seen your husband. He is in the Somuch Cafe on Overlay Island. You should come out. . . ."

The smile was still bright on her lips as she placed the receiver back on its hook. If she knew women, the one at the other end of the enohp was hot enough to burn. . . .

Miss Glaphas Oscabot was humming a tune as she walked toward that perfectly delightful bake shop. . . .

"BUT Mrs. Sanro," the receptionist said hastily. "Your husband stepped out, I mean . . ."

"I know what you mean," Mrs. Sanro said darkly. "I just wanted to use his enohp. And young woman. . . ."

"Yes. . . .?"

"Don't try listening in. Understand?"

The receptionist shook her head. She understood all right. Listen in, Heavens! It was the last thing she would ever think of doing.

Mrs. Sanro dialed a number. A woman's voice answered.

"Is Mr. Morhashphy in?" Mrs. Sanro asked.

The answer was in the affirmative.

"I'd like to talk to him. . . ." There was a wait and then a masculine voice came on. "Mr. Morhashphy, this is Mrs. Sanro. I'm calling to thank you for the feathers. . . . Why the feathers my husband is having made into a dress, the ones you gave him. Oh, you do remember then? Good. Frankly, I want to apologize to you because I accused my husband of something which wasn't so. Here I thought he was out having a good time and now I found out it was true, that you and he had a conference in the office . . . Of course I was wrong! I know that now . . . Well, thanks again for the feathers. And do come out. It's been a long time since you last came over. 'Bye. . . .'"

Her eyes were bleak and stormy as she placed the enohp on its cradle. The nasty little sneak. So he thought he could get away with it. Well, he was going to find out differently. A thought came to her mind. The Island was only a short distance away. She could get there and perhaps catch him in the very act. The receptionist ducked her head as Mrs. Sanro swept past. There was something very much like a hurricane in the lady's eyes. . . .

* * * *

"HONEY CHILE," Miss Zsymysphryx cooed, "Ah jus' adoahs this place."

"Hrmph," Sanro cleared his throat. "Yes. Yes, indeed. But is it necessary to sit so far from me?"

She fluttered the index finger of one of her hands in front of her eyes while the other three hands were busy in patting her hair, fixing her make-up and feeding her

mouth. She just 'adoahed' the food in this cafe. "Now lambikins!" she cautioned. "People might see us."

Sanro looked at the four walls which enclosed them completely and wondered how that could be done without breaking them down. He grinned slyly. She was just being coy, of course. Well, she'd soon get over that. After all, she hadn't played games the last time they were together. He reached over and started to pull her toward him.

His head rocked back and slammed against the back of the seat as one of her hands stopped doodling with her hair and came stingingly against his cheek.

"Now Mister Sanro," she said smilingly. "We mustn't."

"The heck you say," he said, and reached with all four of his hands for her. "I don't like coyness . . ."

Wham! He felt as if he'd been hit by the building. He'd never imagined anything could move with the speed of those dainty hands. They were dainty no longer. Her fists landed with the impact of hammer blows. He ducked, covering himself as best he could with protecting elbows and arms, yet somehow she always managed to get through.

"Stop! Stop!" he squealed.

"Darn right!" she said savagely. "But first . . . Ugh!" she grunted as she got a last blow in. Then without a further word, she got up and started for the door.

"Wait! Miss Zsymys . . ." he bleated.

She turned and he shrank from the fury in her eyes. "And if you think I'm giving back those rings you gave me, you're crazy . . ."

"Will there be anything else, sir?" the waiter asked, coming in on hearing the door close. He had seen the girl leave.

"No. I think I've had enough," Sanro said sadly. He looked blankly at the waiter for a second, then suddenly said, "Wait! Uh, clear these dishes off and bring me some iskewhewy."

At least he'd get *something* out of the afternoon. A good drunk on . . .

The waiter started to close the door on his customer, but stopped at sight of the woman standing nearby. She jerked her head from side to side as her eyes swept the panels of blank-faced doors confronting her. There was something very martial about her. Suddenly the waiter knew for

whom she was looking.

"Can I help you?" he asked.

"I'm looking for a little man, about fifty feet shorter than you," Mrs. Sanro said. "I was told he was dining here."

"On the bald side, around fifty. . . ?" the waiter said.

She nodded her head.

The waiter pointed with a finger to the door he had been about to close. She marched past him without a word and slammed the door on his inquisitive nose.

"Darling!" Sanro crowed. "Why, how did you know I was here?"

HER mouth hung down past her third chin. She kept looking vaguely around as if searching for something. Yet she knew it was in vain. There was no one in the room besides her husband. It was a sheer impossibility for anyone to be there. Unless they were under the table.

She gave him a sickly smile. "Why—why I thought I'd come down and surprise you," she said. "Have lunch with you. But I was told . . . I mean . . ." Her eyes begged forgiveness. Until they spotted the bottle of iskewhewy. "Gao!" she bleated. "What are you doing with that?"

"So you want to know what I'm doing with it?" he asked softly. Her sudden and strange appearance, coming on top of what had happened with the girl, and her undoubted surprise at seeing him alone when she had expected obviously to find him otherwise engaged was a tip-off that someone had talked. He had been very frightened at first. But as she babbled on he realized that his was the upper hand. "Well, I'll tell you. I'm getting drunk. That's what I'm doing. And do you know why? Because I've got a wife who doesn't trust me. Who follows me around. Who thinks every time I leave the office it's for an amorous rendezvous. That's why I'm getting drunk."

She sat down by his side and tried to put her arms around him but he repulsed her.

"Please! Please!" she begged forgiveness. "I was wrong. But what could I do when some old fitch calls me up and says she saw you and a strange woman entering this restaurant? Then when I went to your office you weren't there. And I did the most terrible thing. I called Ishkay . . ."

But Sanro was way ahead of her. "And

Ishkay, I suppose said he knew nothing about the feathers?" he said.

"Yes," she said in a low, miserable voice.

"Of course he did!" Sanro roared. "I told him to keep silent, no matter who asked about them. I told you they were hard to get. Ishkay got them through a smuggler. Do you think he'd talk? But still I knew you. So I told him not even to my wife, the miserable woman."

"Oh. I am that," she said.

He was smart enough to let it ride. She'd dig her grave. Of that he had no doubts.

Quite suddenly she burst into tears. She fell sobbing to his shoulders. He held her with two hands, but the other two were busy in pouring another glass of iskewhey.

"Why did everything have to go wrong today?" she asked bitterly. "First the connection, then that horrible person, and I'll bet my life it was that Oscabot woman who called, and last the attitude of your receptionist. . . ."

Sanro made a mental note to fire her.

". . . and now to find you here, drinking alone."

"A man can enjoy a drink now and then without people thinking him a drunkard, I hope?" Sanro said with great dignity.

"Of course, of course," she said. "I didn't mean anything by it."

"Then why don't you go home, now that you have seen how badly you have made me feel," Sanro said.

It was the clincher. She burst into a wild paroxysm of tears which ended rather quickly. She dried her eyes on a bit of linen from her purse and sniffing several times in self-pity, got up and shook her head.

"Yes. I'll go," she said. "Honey, when you get home you're going to get a very pleasant surprise. I promise you. Something you haven't had in a long time."

Sanro smiled secretively as she left the booth. And poured himself another drink. And another until the bottle was empty. Then he headed back to the office. There were a couple of calls he had to make. Ishkay would have to be warned for one thing, and another, maybe he had another secretary for him. Only a more acquiescent one this time, Sanro hoped.

MRS. SANRO hummed a lively tune as she prepared for her husband's

homecoming. She was in the kitchen preparing the surprise she had spoken of, a dish he was very fond of, Osmus Bird eggs. She had bought them on the black market of course, and paid a very high price. But she didn't care.

She was very careful. That thingumajig the repairman had spoken of was still off. So she didn't throw stuff around as was her usual wont. At last, just as the dish was done, she heard the light footsteps of Sanro in the hall.

She was unusually affectionate, kissing him endearingly in a long embrace. He was quite breathless when she was through.

"Is this the surprise?" he asked.

"Oh no! It's much nicer than that," she said. "Now you wash up and set down to the table and you'll soon see."

He crowded in delight when he saw the dish. If there was anything in particular in the way of food Sanro liked it was Osmus Bird eggs. She started to serve him but before she could there was an interruption. The buzzer in the kitchen sounded.

She opened the door and saw it was a uniformed messenger.

"A package for Mr. Sanro," the boy said. "From Miss Zsymys—from a lady." He couldn't get over her name.

Mrs. Sanro gave the four rings in the package a cursory glance. She was far more interested in the note which came with them. In effect the note said that the girl was sorry about what had happened that afternoon and that Sanro had a lot of nerve attempting what he did, but she forgave him. What was more she was returning the rings because she didn't want Sanro to think she wasn't a nice girl.

She laid the open package at the side of Sanro's plate and made sure that he saw the note beside it. Then she turned and started for the cabinets where she kept her dishes. But he wasn't looking at his wife. His eyes were fixed in a blank look of horror on the rings and note.

"Darling! Look!"

He heard her words as from a long distance. He raised his eyes and a wild fright gleamed in them. His mouth opened and he shrieked:

"Wait! Wait honey! That's your good set. . . ."

But it was too late. She was standing by the open cabinet. Three of her arms held long rows of the largest dishes the cab-

inet contained, most of them some twenty-five feet in diameter. And even as he shrieked in dismay she let go with the first of a barrage. It barely missed his head. For the next twenty minutes Sanro was busier than he had ever been. They were so busy, one throwing and the other ducking, that they didn't see what was happening to the dishes. They simply disappeared. . . . The gravity-dimensiono belt was still off. . . .

CLARENCE BENDIX looked up and blinked his eyes rapidly. No! He was seeing things. He peered through narrowed eyes again at what his eyes were seeing on the face of the sunsetting sky. Saucers! Flying saucers. Either that or some new form of plane. Immediately the thought came to him, they were from another planet. But when he spoke of them later he called them flying disks. . . .

THE END

SALVAGE IN THE SEA

By CHARLES RECOUR

SOME of the technological improvements that always follow a war have led to their use in peaceful fields. This is not to justify the war but it at least shows that some good comes of it.

Invariably, following a war, deep-sea research takes a turn for the better. Often in wartime ships carrying expensive nonperishable cargoes are sunk, and it is worth the while of any man to attempt to recover that lost wealth. In addition there is a frantic effort on the part of scientists to make use of every possible improvement that the war has produced in machinery and in methods. This then accounts—the latter, that is—for the Piccard brothers' renewed efforts at attaining the depths. Another great technician, Lt. Commander Rieseberg, is turning his efforts once again toward the salvage of sunken ships with the idea of recovering their commercially valuable cargoes.

Rieseberg is well known for his famous work as a deep sea diver. He is no less known for his extraordinarily fine management of diving operations from the executive standpoint. He has the faculty of being both a thinker and a man of action. He can translate plans into reality, a type of action that is sadly lacking these days. In any event he has designed a new device for working in the depths of the ocean. It is a self-contained caterpillar tank, linked to surface at will by a cable but capable of independent motion of its own.

The only previously constructed device with which it might be compared is the metal diving suit designed some years ago which permitted a man to attain great depths and work at those depths independent of surface air. This metal suit, however, confined the operator to limited motion and furthermore a man has only so much strength to operate its almost rigid arms. Hence the need of a similar if more powerful invention. Rieseberg's gadget fills the bill. It is an ingenious machine.

Imagine something straight out of science fiction. His machine is a tank essentially, riding on caterpillar treads driven by electric motors. These

treads may be operated from storage batteries within the airtight undersea craft, or through a power cable from a ship above. Looking somewhat like a pyramid on treads the monstrous machine is studded with arms and jaws capable of independent movement and under the exact control of the two or three operators within the cabin confines. The arms are operated by a series of levers ingeniously arranged to enable them to grasp almost anything ranging from a toothpick to a treasure chest. Because the power furnished to operate them is hydraulic, as in a brake, almost unlimited forces may be exerted. Many different attachments have been designed to supplement the capabilities of the arms. For example, if it so desired, an underwater cutting oxy-acetylene torch may be fastened to one or more arms and these used to cut their way into a sunken ship's hull. Or perhaps a huge pair of metal-cutting shears may be connected to an arm. Peering through the heavy glass ports into depths as great as three miles, the operators can perform almost any action they desire, just as if they were working calmly at the bench of a shop above the sea.

The air supplied them comes from bottles of oxygen within the hull of the strange undersea mobile, and electric power to furnish the basis of operation may come from one of the two sources mentioned above. The ship may cruise slowly at a maximum rate of about five miles per hour over the bottom of the sea. Or it may be lowered and lifted into position at the command of the crew through either ordinary electric telephone connections or through a sonic communicator.

Nor is the vessel helpless in an emergency. Should the occasion arise that forces them to ascend to the surface, a signal to the ship above—and up goes the craft at the end of the cable. If it is not connected to the cable there are emergency buoyancy tanks and spare tanks of air which will empty them of their water and almost like a cork the vessel will shoot surface-ward. But the dangers of the sea remain—not even time will eliminate them.



Flesh Against Spirit

by Alexander Blade

**Life is a peculiar thing. What does occur
when we die? Is there really a scientific basis
for a "spirit" world? If so, how would it be?**

AS YOU know, Far-spanning One, in the depths of space much life dwells, of divers kinds. Where no dying sun breeds no early death, far in the lanes of infinite freedom, there are vast tides of force. Sometimes the wash of these tides crosses your earth, but only at intervals

of many thousands of years.

There are two tides of force predominant, and one is life-giving, and one is death-bringing.

Far out where no great sphere of matter exists to draw the minute birth particles of matter together, there the great waves



They did not know the menace that floated above them . . .

of energy dash on and on forever through the dark spaces—these are the Tides of Tee.

It is there that the Gods of the Flesh live, those who have never died. They follow the Tides of Tee in great life-ships, and they grow ever greater, for the force of the tide flows is strengthening and none who live at the peak waves of the tides ever die.

Their life is a following of the great tides through space, an ever-voyaging on and on. They are the pioneers who never stop their search for better life. And they find it too.

There is yet another tide sweeps across the placid fields of the night. It is made up of the gathering together of the particles of energy which have been infected with disintegration, but are not yet wholly repellent each of the other.

These, gradually growing more and more repellent of all things and each other, find their course directed eventually toward that place in space least attractive to all things. Toward this Nadir of Emptiness flow the Tides of Dlee, and that place where they go is the place shunned most of all life.

But there is a form of life which does not fear death, for it has already died!

You see, Reacher for Wisdom, when the bodies of the Immortal Flesh Gods do finally, by some awful mischance, meet their ends, there is within them a kind of core of energy which is strong with the life-strength that was.

This vague and immaterial core is called the Spirit, and it differs greatly from all other life forms. As the flesh dies, this spirit withdraws, flies like a bird free of all other binding or holding such as leashed the flesh-matter.

Out into space flies this spirit, and seeks out other spirits of the Dead Gods, courses with them throughout space.

These spirits build great cities out of the tenuous Ethe, that which you call ether, binding the flow of it into rigidity with the wisdom they win in their undying.

Such is the way of the dead Gods who yet live as Spirits. It is a thing little believed in this modern darkness of the mind. For that matter, neither do you know of or believe in the old Fleshly Gods.

Little sailor of the void, flesh like yours seldom forms the incorruptible seed of self which the spirit carries free of the death

of the flesh.

Men like yourself, never seeing the spirit, nor hearing it, nor feeling it, cease to believe in it.

You may believe it or not without anyone caring greatly or the universe falling through your sin. It makes no matter or no spirit either.

If, after you die, you should find yourself alive, then you would know what to do if you had listened well to my talk. Listen, for an immortal life is a long one indeed.

Since it has become the degenerate fashion to disbelieve all wonderful things, remember that what I say is only a thing that might be true.

This story is the tale of a battle between the Lords of the Dead, and the Lords of the Living Flesh. But you do not have to believe that I who rest here before your tiny ship like a great dark cloud am really anything but your mind crazed with loneliness.

* * *

ONCE, in the very birthplace of time itself, there was a mighty kingdom of Etherean Folk. They had constructed a plateau of force, and upon the plateau the currents of space began to form an eddy, and in the midst of their peace and their supplies of gathered *heine* (which is a word for the stuff they gather for food), a little ball of corpor began to grow, which was not as they had planned.

This plateau was like a great floating island, which moved with the movements of the currents of space, keeping always in the great quiet swirls of the forces which made their plateau favorable to their life. They grew and prospered and were very beautiful, very lazy and talented, very much absorbed in enjoying their immortal life.

They remembered very well their life in the flesh, and they swam back and forth through the Ethe, the stuff of space, which holds all things in solution. Ethe is like water in that it dissolves the stuff of matter in one place, and deposits it in another, according to the whims of its currents.

They swam back and forth between their plateau cities, and between them and certain planets.

These great planets were the worlds upon which the Flesh Lords had been born, and upon which the Spirit People had been born, before they met death in one way

or another.

The spirits loved to visit these planets, but they could not remain long in the turbulent Ethe about the planets of life, their substance was too tenuous, and they sometimes perished. For it is true that spirits can only live under very favorable conditions.

Now there were upon the planets many mighty cities, teeming with young and old flesh people. Age to them meant not getting weak and shriveled, but getting too big to live comfortably. When they became old, they built great steel ships out in the *ethe*, far from any planet, and left their homes behind. Every period of the passage of the tides, many of these ships left the planets of life, and voyaged off into the dark in search of new homes where their size would be proportionate. This meant long, arduous voyages, guided only by their knowledge of the direction of the currents of space, and they sought through all the many converging currents of space for those vast eddies where *corpor* crystallizes out of *ethe* into *planets*, and searched the planets there for those huge, half-formed bodies whose density was slight but circumference great. For upon such planets their great size would be proportionate, and their density also capable of supporting their size. For as a planet grows in density, greater and greater muscles and heavier, more dense bones are required, so that a man who grew to great size on a small planet must seek a planet of greater size and less density to live upon. So it is that the Lords of Immortal Flesh must seek ever for new and greater planets condensing out of Ethe upon which to build their homes.

Now the vast eddy of force current in the center of which the race of spirit people had built their plateau came to have in its center a ball of corpor, which grew greater century by century. At last this ball was found, and a certain group of flesh people decided to settle there for a time, since their size and their density were exactly proportionate to the size and density and state of growth of the new planet.

The vast migration ships of the flesh people blasted right through the unseen substance of the tenuous plateau of the spirit people, landed upon the great, dark ball of corpor* within the sweet, peaceful eddy of force. And they noticed the spirit people not at all, for they were of those

young, hardy, callous and unperceptive fleshly types of life which are unable to see or hear the subtle signs and thoughts of the delicate spirits.

It could even be that they did not believe in the unseen or the unseeable, even as you. About that I could not say.

So it was that the spirit people declared war upon the flesh people, convinced that they must drive out the great, crude beasts who were to them but infants of the life path.

THEIR wisdom was great, but their tools were fragile.

The great steel ships of the flesh people lay in the green forest paths of the new planet, lit by the self-light of force-impact, which is the light of such planets which are fit for new cities of flesh.

About them, in the perfumed air, swam the spirit people, oppressed by the raw vigor of the flesh, busy with their building.

There was, among the spirit people, a young captain named Sar'Jis. Sar'Jis settled his spirit form within the great body of the leader of the flesh colonists, a vigorous and beautiful female called Nomae.

Also among the leaders of the flesh was a male called D'Artag, who loved the female Nomae. And within his flesh settled a spirit called Lokeen, and these two hidden within the flesh began their work of destroying and driving out the flesh people.

Lokeen began by working in the mind of D'Artag, killing one by one the tiny thought cells which loved the beautiful Nomae, and teaching younger cell egos to hate her. Teaching them that if it were not for Nomae he would be the foremost leader of them all, and all would obey him.

Sar'Jis began his work by making the mind of Nomae turn away from the love of D'Artag, and engrossing her with the work of building and organizing the new city of the flesh people so that the work of Lokeen would not be undone by her love. And D'Artag saw that Nomae did not love him, and the jealousy growing

**Corpor*: Anything that has three dimensions and is perceptible to sight, hearing and feeling. *Ethe* is the solvent of corpor. The great ethereal firmament is a dense solution of corpor. (Etherea is in the main transparent, but in some places translucent, and in others, opaque.) A vortex in etherea causes corpor to collect in center, origin of comets, planets, etc.—*Oakspe*.

within him mounted without opposition to a devouring passion.

Now, the rest of the flesh people were also parasitized by the tenuous bodies of the spirit race, and their thoughts became distorted into tools of the spirit's purpose. Evil thought they were given for their own good, true thoughts, and they did not know the terrible thing that was being done to them.

So that as Time flowed on its mysterious path of unknown change, the new settlement upon the great, new planet became an evil place, shunned by all flesh people not of those living there. No ships landed from the far-flung planet homes of the flesh people, and no news went out from the great New City that Nomae was building ever greater in spite of the evil rampant among her followers. For her eyes were blinded by Sar'Jis within her, and her will worked on blindly to make of the new home of her race a fine thing. But her people worked less and less, and gave themselves up to pleasure more and more, and all the many evils of which you know so little in your ignorance became among them a way of life that slowly began to devour the strength and virility of her people.

Now the rulers of the spirit people began to see a change taking place in the natures of those they had sent to do this evil deed to the unknowing flesh. The evil thoughts they manufactured in the minds of their hosts became part of their nature, and their own spirit people regretted that the plan for the destruction of the flesh had been undertaken. There came a night, when the parasitic spirits rose from their sleeping hosts to take rest and pleasure on their plateau city, in their old homes, and flew up into the bright ethere to the great, misty gates of their home. The spirit people saw them come from afar, a great cloud, and saw that they were evil, and feared them greatly. So greatly that they barred the gates of the ethereal city to the warriors from the bodies of the flesh, and turned them away from their homes. The host of spirits turned sadly away from their home, and returned to the bodies of the flesh people, for they knew not what else to do.

But the will to destroy the flesh people was gone from their fragile bodies, and no longer did they incite the big flesh people to hatred of each other. Gradually the sin of laziness and pleasure-indulgence de-

creased again. The flesh people began to look about with eyes unobscured by the evil will of the spirits parasitically within them, although not all. Many of them, such as Dartag with the spirit Looken within him, still hated each other, and especially Dartag hated Naomee and believed that he would be much better off without her. Especially he hated the fact that he could not take his eyes off her, or keep her out of his thoughts at all, but wanted always to be where he could see her.

NOW fully half the returned spirits cast out from their former homes in the above got together with Looken as their leader, and decided that they must go on with their plan to drive out the flesh and then they would have this planet all to themselves and not require any plateau of ethere which had cast them out.

But Sar'Jis, from within the body of the beautiful Naomee saw no future in this plan, for they could build nothing or have nothing without these flesh people to do it for them here on the round ball of corpor. Sar'Jis decided that to parasitize these people forever was their only hope, now that their own had turned against them. So he gathered together the people who held allegiance to Naomee, and planned to subjugate and enslave those who held allegiance to Dartag, with the dark Looken hidden inside him. Then they could forever take their ease while the others did their work for them. Which was not a new idea, but seemed so to Sar'Jis, and he knew there was no other way.

So it was that Naomee and her people armed themselves and set out to enslave the mighty Dartag and all his warriors.

Naturally there were given and taken many great strokes, many great bolts of fire flung from the cannon of their ships, much blood shed. And in the end, the spirits riding within the great, strong bodies found the shock of ray-bolts, the crash of ship against ship and the dreadful anger and emotional stress of the conflict too terrible to endure, and little by little they found their fragile bodies shredded and melting, and at last they began to gather far above the battle lines, weak and worn and without strength to control their hosts. And Sar'Jis gathered himself together from the shreds and patches still left whole and flew up to his host now hovering above the battle.



NAOMEE

Last to leave was Lokeen, and the anger he brought with him was great, so that he swooped upward on wide, beating wings and flung himself upon Sar'Jis, forgetting their former alliance. And the two great spirits battled together far above the flesh-battle and tore each other into little fragments that slowly settled like dark mist, floating patches of might-have-been drifting down upon the great bodies of flesh below.

Now when Naomee and Dartag were no longer in thrall to the spirits within them, their minds came awake, and the love in them spoke out and called the battle to an end. And before the hosts they embraced, and plighted their troth.

Drifting higher and higher, the weakened spirits saw all their plans go thus into waste, and their two leaders likewise vanished in far pursuit, each of the other. Like lost souls they turned away, and they drifted higher and higher, till the great currents of space caught them up and bore

them outward and outward, sadly and weakly fluttering.

Up past the great mist-pearled gates of their home on the plateau they drifted, and sadly they tried to enter, and were barred, and driven from the gates. Like a great cloud of weary sorrow they drifted, higher and outward, until the Tides of Dlee caught them and bore them onward into the Nadir of Emptiness.

Naomee and Dartag ruled their planet and life grew great and strong and happy again.

But of the spirits who had thought to conquer the flesh, nothing remained but a memory that was like an evil stench in their homes.

YOU see, Far-spanning One, *flesh* and *spirit* are two kinds of life, and one must have nothing to do with the other, or *evil* comes of it. And all this worry about one being the profit of the other's

work, or the other being responsible for the one, is untrue. So if you meet a spirit in space, do not fear him, but ask him the way to the places where *ethe* becomes *corpor*, for there you must go to live in the flesh.

For neither the flesh nor the spirit is inherently evil, but either can become evil by mistaken thought.

There are Gods of the Flesh, and there are Gods of the Spirit, and they have little business with each other. For a fish cannot live in the air, but requires water. Neither can a spirit live in the air, but only in space where the *ethe* is rich in *heine*. Or within a man's body where life breeds life.

The spirit can die, and the flesh can die. By proper degrees, a spirit can become flesh, but only in the same way that a planet grows into great size by acquiring *corpor* bit by bit out of *ethe*.

Even so, flesh becomes spirit, by proper degrees of inner growth, and when the flesh perishes, the spirit can live on if there is in all-pervading *ethe* that *heine* which it needs. These things are mysterious to the wisdom workers of the flesh you have known, and so you are confused.

Both flesh and spirit have their life-conditions in which they grow and exist and take pleasure in life—and neither can exist in conditions different than required. So do not tell me that your teachers do not agree, for I have other wisdom than they.

Even so a fish cannot live in the air, but some fish have the power of growing lungs and crawling out of the water at a stage of their growth. There are many kinds of life, and many kinds of spirits, and some can drift from corpor to *ethe* and back again, and some cannot, which gives rise to much

misunderstanding in persons of little observation. But I would not advise an ordinary spirit to try to ride a strong flesh person into battle, for the shock of corpor in strife will cause him to fall apart. Unless, indeed, he is that kind of spirit life which can reassemble itself, which is rare.

"And what is your name, O great dark spirit who knows so much?"

"My name is Lokeen, little one of the flesh world."

"And what is that bright cloud that follows you, approaching closer even now?"

"The name of that spirit is Sar'Jis, and he is mad with desire to destroy me, so that I flee always, and always he pursues. We are accursed, we two. You see, I was mistaken. The spirit is not greater than the flesh!"

* * *

LOKEEN spread his wide wings and sped away, and hard after him came a glowing brightness, with a flaming sword in his talons. I knew then that I had talked with an immortal accursed. I called out to the glowing spirit:

"What path do I follow among all these of space, to find other lives than my own?"

The terrible voice of living anger called out to me, shaking my little ship:

"The paths that we tread are the paths of death, go thou backward upon our trail . . ."

But there was no trail, there was only the dread current of Dlee, sweeping me ever toward the Nadir of Emptiness.

So I whisper to you: There is a life which does not fear Death, for it has died. But it does fear life. . . .

I fear this planet which has drawn me. I cannot breathe. . . .

LIFETIME HUMBUGGERY



By



WARREN L. FOLEY

IT WAS in 1847 that Mr. and Mrs. John Fox and their several children came to live in a small farmhouse in upper New York State. They were good, simple folks, and settled easily into the peaceful life of the community. Interested neighbors told them stories about the house into which they had moved, stories of a murder which had been committed in the house, and of the ghost of the murdered man which still hovered

about the place, rapping and pounding in the house at night. The Foxes weren't afraid of ghosts, they said, and as the weeks went by they saw or heard no ghostly doings.

Then a young girl relative came to visit them, sleeping with Margaret and Katherine Fox, aged eight and six years. The girl, Elizabeth, was wakened for several nights out of a sound sleep by something which startled her, though she

could not say what it was. Then one night Mrs. Fox heard raps in the girls' room. She rushed in, but all three were asleep. There was discussion of the raps among the family the next day, and the next night they occurred again. The children's bed was moved into the parents' room, but after the lights were out the rapping was heard again.

The children were much intrigued by these goings-on. They named the rapper "Mr. Splitfoot," and six-year-old Katherine tried playing games with him, asking him to rap the number of times she clapped her hands, to count a certain number, etc. Margaret played the game also. Mrs. Fox then tested the ghost, or spirit, by asking questions, and receiving raps in answer, and discovered that it was the spirit of the man who had long ago been murdered in that house.

Neighbors were invited to hear the strange and obliging ghost, but he would rap only when Margaret and Katherine were there. Soon the girls and their spirit became locally famous. Then they went to visit an elder sister in Rochester, and the strange rappings went wherever the girls did. The spirit took a dislike to their sister's husband, Calvin, and threw slippers and other objects at him in the darkness.

Their sister, Leah, was very excited about these strange happenings, and spread the news. People from all over the city came to call, and it was not long before the story was told in newspapers across the country, and even in the foreign press. Leah began to charge an admission fee to those who came to listen to the rappings. It was soon learned that the little girls could not only talk with old Splitfoot, but with the spirit of anyone who had died.

Leah took them to New York, and formed a "Spiritualistic" society, which grew swiftly, and soon took the form of a religion. The girls attracted much attention, and toured the country

giving seances. From this start came a great wave of Spiritualism, with thousands of other people claiming the spirits would also perform for them.

In spite of this competition, Margaret travelled about for forty years, making a bare living out of the rappings. Through the years the idea was campaigned against by ministers and others, and scientific men investigated the business and called it an imposition. Finally, in 1888, in an interview with newspaper men, Margaret confessed that the rappings had been made since childhood by a peculiar manner in which she snapped the joints of her toes.

She explained that the whole thing had started as a mischievous prank of two naughty little girls. They knew their mother was easily frightened, and they wished to tease her. The startling of the girl Elizabeth which came preliminary to the first rappings was caused by Margaret or Katherine pinching her after she had gone to sleep. The first rappings were caused by an apple tied to a string, then bounced up and down on the floor! When many people began to get excited by the supposed contact with spirits, the girls practiced making the noise with their toes. Presumably Sister Leah soon discovered that the raps were a trick, but something had been started that would have been difficult to stop, and there was plenty of money in it for them, at least at first.

After her exposure of the hoax, Margaret repeated her confessions in a series of lectures, expecting to make a living this way. She soon learned that the public is more anxious to pay to be humbugged than it is to be educated. In fact, in spite of her repeated confessions of fraud, and the exposure of her lifetime of trickery, she shortly went to New York and again became a medium. For six years more, until her death in 1895, she supported herself by means of her toe rappings.

ATMOSPHERIC PARADOX

By ALFRED MARX

WHAT goes up doesn't always come down. Take the air for instance. Strange as it seems, more air goes up than ever comes down. This is true both as to mass and as to volume.

The volume of ascending air is always greater than that of descending air. The vertical circulation of the air is a matter of gravity. Colder air is relatively more contracted, hence denser, and sinks, forcing upward adjacent air which is warmer and lighter, buoying it up. The volume of the rising air, being warmer and expanded, is therefore always larger, mass for mass, than the contracted, colder, descending air.

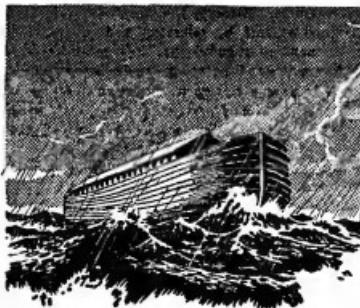
In spite of the difference in size, due to expansion and contraction, of masses of ascending and descending air, it would still seem that the mass of air which goes up must be the same as that

which eventually returns. This is not true, because part of this mass, the water vapor which rose upward as one of the ingredients of the atmosphere, descended to the earth as snow, rain or hail. It did not return as part of the air, the gaseous substance which it formerly was, but as a liquid or a solid. This water vapor usually amounts to about one to two per cent of the ascending atmosphere, while the descending air contains a much smaller proportion, since a good deal of it has ceased being a part of the air, but has become rain, snow or hail.

World-wide precipitation is some sixteen million tons a second. By this great amount does the mass of rising air exceed that of falling air. So, paradoxical as it may be, all the air that goes up, does not come down.

THE END

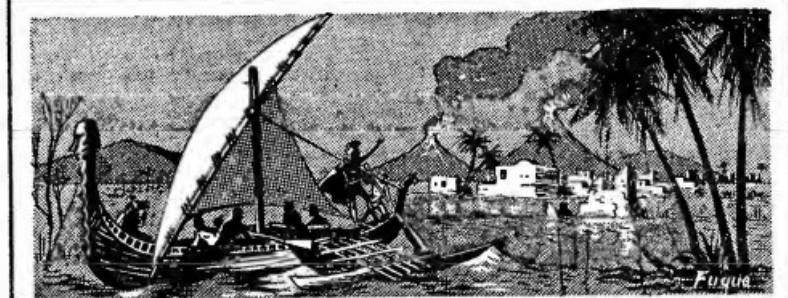
SCIENTIFIC



The disasters that must have accompanied the Great Flood might be likened to the disasters that took place at the turn of the century. Mt. Tacoma, in Guatemala, started it, by shaking the surrounding terrain severely. Kingston, Jamaica, was visited by a tidal wave. Martinique volcano blew up; then Guadalajara in Mexico, St. Vincent and Momotombo near Lake Managua erupted. Violent earthquakes and an undersea eruption concluded the series.



Easter Island seems to have been a much larger island in the remote past. It is the highest volcano cap of the submerged Albatross Plateau, now capped



Rapid changes in sea-level would cause racial memories of island homelands from which terrified inhabitants were forced to flee. Among these legends is that of Votan, who, seeing his home desiccated by a series of earthquakes and floods, decided to abandon it forever. Thus, the end of the Pleistocene may have ended island-empires!

MYSTERIES

WAS THERE A GREAT FLOOD?

By L. TAYLOR HANSEN

This is one of the most discussed mysteries of the past history of the earth, and will continue to be of great interest

THREE is only one scientific explanation for the story of The Flood, which seems to be shared by every Amerind tribe from the tip of one continent to the tip of the other, and that is that it was a race-memory of the end of the Pleistocene.

When the great continents met at the North, Greenland was unfortunate enough to be under the pole. It had been, once upon a time, a warm land with delicate tropical ferns and palms. The impressions of the plants and animals of that day are still engraved upon the rocks. Then came the explosions of her giant mountains. She is still a high land, carrying even yet most of the load of her Pleistocene ice.

The shock of the bumping continents reached the fortieth parallel before the close of the Pleistocene, and probably the Caribbean sometime later. There were also complicating movements. The parts of the continents which were ice-capped, were down-warped under their load. In the region of Hudson Bay where the cap was thick, this pressure forced down the rocks as much as a thousand feet, and more.¹ But the reaction took place still farther along. The continent as one went south rose out of its lava base, rather rapidly as one passed the ice and then again further south, again dipped down. This peculiar wave-like bending was reversed during the interglacial and then again reversed as the onset of the next glacial began and another sheet began to weigh down the Sial blocks of the north. At the present time the continental parts which had been ice-capped are showing a strong reaction.²

¹ From the region of New England to Hudson there is a decided present rising movement which is in proportion to the former depression. Thus Hudson Bay, which was under great ice weight and sunk from it, is now rapidly rising. The region beyond the ice which was then up, for Georgia Banks were then dry land, is now being depressed. The rate of the sinking along this coast is about a foot per century.

² (See Antevs and Daly.) Scandinavia is rising 3.3 ft. per century probably due to a deep inflow of the Sisma. At Hudson Bay the uplift is 1,250 and increases as one goes north. (Daly.)

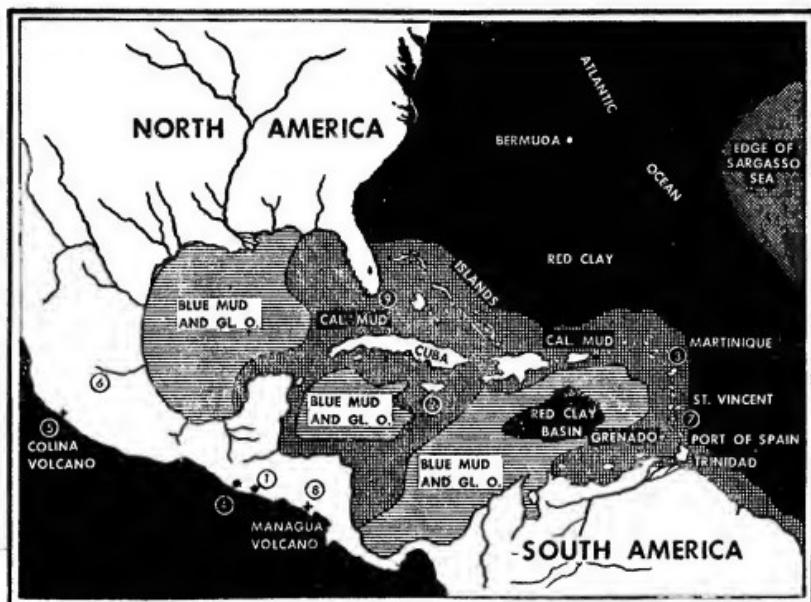
Heralded by the crashing of great lava bombs, the old volcanoes, probably considered by their human inhabitants as having been extinct for untold ages, began to announce that the Pleistocene was drawing to a close. It is quite probable that this was a twice-enacted production, since it had perhaps also heralded the coming of the interglacial. The interglacial, by the way, was much longer than the time which has elapsed since the last ice age, so it is possible that there may be another return of the ice, for we have not solved the reason for the ice-fluctuations.

If this drama did take place twice or perhaps three times, those periods were so widely separated, that the inhabitants were well-justified in looking upon the volcanoes as extinct. It is quite possible, geologically, that there is no such thing as an extinct volcano, and that like various geysers, they react to the general pulse, or else that they each have their period, and that some of the periods may be many thousands of years in length.

With the thundering of the volcanoes, which the inhabitants probably regarded as the whims of the Old Fire-god, stirred into anger because of some fancied wickedness on the part of his children, and which they immediately set about to assuage with sacrifices, the impact of the continents again began to be felt. It has never been as terrific, however, as when the Southern Block rammed and partly over-rode the Northern.

However, with this series of eruptions came the tearing of the Sialic crust along the Mexico-Caribbean line, the probable draining of the Great Inland Sea, and the beginning of the submerging of the Caribbean Rim. Yet the troubles for the human inhabitants had only begun, for now the water which had been for all the thousands of years of their history and racial-memory locked up in the ice-caps began to melt. Some authorities have considered that a few hot summers probably hastened the process,³ after the retreat had gotten well under way, and the rapidity with

³ See Antevs, who is one of the best authorities. Baron De Green, a Swedish geologist, believes from a summary of moraines that the glaciers did not begin to melt until 13,500 years ago. This has had a tendency to shorten older estimates.



MAP OF THE SUPPOSED CARIBBEAN ARCH.

The Calcareous Mud of the Caribbean is to be found along the sunken mountain range of volcanic peaks which stretch in an almost continuous line from Venezuela and British Guiana to Florida, touching the mainland at both Guatemala and Yucatan. This deposit shows a heavy composition of volcanic ash and volcanic glass, fragments of quartz and other land-derived rocks, particularly lava, with smaller portions of hornblende, augite, magnetite, etc.

Globigerina Ooze (Globigerine Oöze) and Blue Mud are relatively shallow water deposits, showing much less evidence of lava.

Red Clay is a deep-water deposit. One basin of this deposit will be found to be cross-barred for easier identification.

The Sargasso Sea, a mass of floating weeds, which ships avoid, is the supposed site of the Legendary Lost Atlantis.

Disaster sites are numbered in the order of their occurrence.

Map compiled by author from the U. S. Geol. Survey and Chemical Analyses by J. G. Fairchild and E. M. Thorpe.

which the level of the sea rose, covering the tops of what had been the highest mountains of their island-benches, must indeed have seemed like the end of the world.

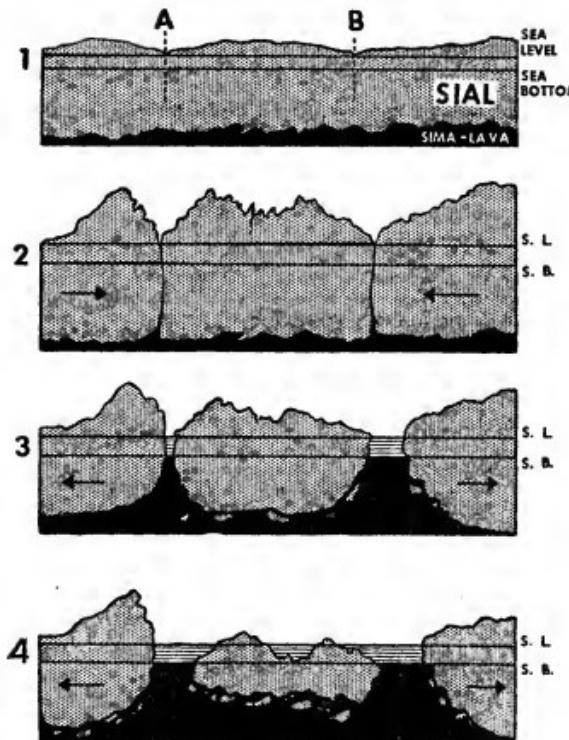
THIS rapid change in sea-level would be inclined to throw out of balance the isostatic adjustment of land and water masses, again striking at the zone of weakness with more volcanism and the submerging of more fragments. No wonder that we have racial memories of island homelands from which the terrified inhabitants, after having dwelt in security and even luxury for untold ages, were forced, after a series of convulsions, followed by a flood, to flee in disorder! Of these legends, none is so geologically sound as that of Votan, who, seeing his home dessicated by a series of earthquakes and floods, decided to abandon it forever. As for the location of that homeland, it may have had one of several locations,

for indeed, it is a tragedy which may well have been enacted many times.

Thus the end of the Pleistocene may indeed be viewed as the time of the end of island-empires, and the beginning of continental kingdoms. It was the time of invading fleets of refugees who landed in erstwhile colonies, or upon savage shores, where those savages never forgot the shining garments or the plumed head-dresses of their gods who anciently came to live with them.

And it was the beginning of continental kingdoms. It was the time when the colonists who had held native populations in subjection were overthrown, and when the tribal deities who had long fought a losing battle with the great island-empires were at last to taste a long-delayed revenge.

Yet we cannot regard the end of the Pleistocene as a period of great geological violence quite set apart from our own time. The great continental



HOW THE CARIBBEAN ARCH MAY HAVE BEEN DROPPED

- 1) Sketch 1 is an average low-lying landscape with valleys cut by the rivers A and B.
- 2) Millions of years have passed and much change has taken place. The land has been crushed together, thus raising high mountains. The rivers at A and B had cut deep gorges in the raised land. Then tensional forces had just begun to be felt. Valleys A and B being the zones of weakness, developed profound rifts.
- 3) The tensional forces increased as the Sial Blocks to either side of A and B began to move in opposite directions. The rifts of A and B widened and the center sialic fragment, left with no support, began to remelt at the bottom.
- 4) The rifts have continued to periodically rebreak and widen. At each break, the lost fragment of Sial drops more deeply into the Sima. It will continue to do so until the crust stops breaking, thus indicating that a complete adjustment has been reached.

forces are even yet at work. It is true that we are now passing through one of the most quiet times. The earth has always had millions of years of tranquility ended by a few millenniums of great convulsion, even as the beginning of the Tertiary wrote fit to what for the Northern Block had been a long, quiet Mesozoic.

That the great continental movements are still going on is evident to the geologist on every hand. The profound rifts upon the backbone of the Andes, where the deepest earthquakes are centered;⁵ the great wrinkles (foredeeps) in the ocean's floor along the western coast of South America, as that continent rides into the Pacific, pushing the ocean floor before it like the blunt prow of a great ship would push a semi-hard mass of cement, testifies to the colossal strength of these forces.

The bend of the California coastline with its seeming story of a long steady rise and then sudden cracking and submergence of a portion of it, such as we read in the Channel Islands with their continental rocks and lost villages, as well as the apparently surface-eroded canyons of lost rivers now far below the green waves of the Pacific, testifies to the aeons of time involved.

Nor is this all. We might read in the story of

⁵ It is a curious geological fact that the deepest earthquakes both in Asia and in South America are located some distance from the coast and the shallower ones toward the coast. Thus the ones in South America with the deepest epicenters strike on the eastern side of the Andes usually, and those with shallower epicenters, closer to the Pacific.

Easter Island on its lava cap, which is only the highest volcano of its submerged Albatross Plateau, the ultimate fate of Japan which totters upon the brink of one of the greatest abysses in the Pacific floor. Should it suddenly rift off, it would cause one of the most disastrous global tidal-waves of all time. However, it is far more likely to be submerged gradually, after a long series of earthquakes, interspersed with periods of comparative quiet. And the process may take so long that no one is aware of what is happening except the geologists.

When we read the old descriptions of Easter Island which the Dutch explorers gave us, it seems to have been a much larger and more desirable place than the tiny island of today.⁶ Yet the most fascinating studies of moving arcs of islands are made upon the Dutch possessions around Australia. As one geologist has stated it, one can almost see them roll out into the Pacific.

At intervals the old zone of weakness which for the Americas is the still unstable Caribbean again awakens. At the turn of the century a series of disasters took place which make the most interesting material for study. Mt. Tacoma in Guatemala (and by the way this is a Pacific Coast name for the Great Reformer, used largely from the state of Washington to Lower California), began the series of disasters by shaking the surrounding terrain severely on April the eighteenth. Kingston, Jamaica, was visited by a tidal wave, showing a submarine displacement on May the sixth.⁷ On May the eighth, with a

few days of preliminary rumbling, the volcano on Martinique blew up, killing hundreds with fumes and ashes and burying others beneath its lava.

At the same time the volcano Soconuse on the border between Guatemala and Mexico showed activity, as well as the Colima Volcano. On May the twelfth, Guadalajara Volcano in Mexico erupted, while May the thirteenth saw the terrible explosion upon St. Vincent with its toll of human life. The following day, the supposedly long-extinct Momotombo Volcano near the northwest end of Lake Managua erupted violently, showering the jungles with molten rock and shaking the entire peninsula of Nicaragua. The series was ended with a number of violent earthquakes, the edge of which touched the tip of Florida where watchers upon the beach saw a glow at sea followed by thunderous reports as some uninhabited volcano burst forth. This occurred on May tenth, or a little more than a month after the series began.

Thus the Caribbean again in our day reminded us of the stronger series of disasters which terrorized mankind at that long-distant time which legend has named The Flood.

⁶ See *The Totem of the Spider*.

⁷ During this disturbance in the Caribbean there was a drastic change in bottom level. A French ship mending a broken cable reported abysses of more than a thousand feet drop in which great stretches of the cable had been swallowed.

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THE END

SEQUOIAS — OLDEST LIFE ON EARTH

NATURE'S only living proof that the giant age ever existed lies in the Sequoia forests of California. By some miracle a remnant of giant trees in western America escaped extinction at the time that changes in earth's climate wiped out of existence the prehistoric dinosaurs, pterodactyls, giant sloths and sahartoofed tigers. Fossil finds have proved that the Sequoia or its near relatives once clothed the earth over large areas at the time the giant animals roamed the world. Most of the forests of giant trees were destroyed when the ice age came upon the earth. Lightning and primitive man carried on the work of destruction. By some inexplicable freak of chance, Sequoia forests remained in two parts of what is now California, and still exist today, a living monument to past ages.

There are two kinds of Sequoia. The Sequoia gigantea, or big trees, are found on the western slopes of the Sierra Nevada, while the Sequoia sempervirens, or redwoods, grow in a belt along the northern coast of California. The redwood is the taller, but the big trees are stouter and greater in bulk, and live longer. The big trees like the mountain air; the redwood thrives on the rolling fogs of the ocean. The evergreen growth of the redwood is in flat sprays, with a spire like that of a spruce; the foliage of the big tree is in hanging plumes, and the crown is rounded instead of pointed.

The size of these trees is almost incredible. Three hundred feet they often tower into the heavens, with a diameter at the base of thirty to forty feet. The first large limbs are five or six

feet in diameter, and begin at a height of seventy to a hundred feet above the ground.

Even more stimulating to the imagination than their size, is the age of the Sequoia trees. The oldest one known was cut down in 1892, and judging from the concentric rings in the trunk, was at that time three thousand two hundred and ten years old. There has been some debate among scientists as to the accuracy of judging the age of the trees by the rings, it being the opinion of some that the trees may have formed more than one ring in a year. Even the most skeptical, however, believe that the age of some of the oldest living trees is at least twenty-five hundred years. On the average, the redwoods are estimated to live from one thousand to twenty-five hundred years, while their longer-lived Sierra cousins live from fifteen hundred to three thousand years.

The trees are nearly indestructible. Lightning is their worst enemy, and though it seldom kills a tree outright, it will split the tops. All old Sequoias have lost their heads by lightning at least once. The bark is from twelve to eighteen inches thick. Insects and fungous growths affect it hardly at all. The wood, containing scarcely any resin, does not ignite easily, and if it does catch on fire, it burns slowly.

The vitality of these patriarchs is as amazing as their size and their age. A tree which has been burned to an extent which seems complete destruction, will sometimes send out new, vigorous shoots. Almost any stump left by the lumberman's saw soon sends up new sprouts, sometimes straight from the core itself. The seed of this tree which becomes such a huge thing, is very tiny, being smaller than a mustard seed. It is estimated that eighty per cent of the present redwoods come from stump sprouts rather than from seed. From each old stump springs a group of new shoots, from four to a dozen, and each forms a perfect new tree. The circle thus formed is a feature of the redwood groves. The name of the redwood, *sempervirens*, or everliving, comes from this remarkable ability to propagate itself, rather than from its longevity.

The coastal redwoods were discovered in 1769, and soon became well known. Strangely, however, the gigantea, or big trees of the Sierra Nevada were hidden from white men until 1852.

One or two hunters probably saw them before that time, but little credence was given to their stories. A hunter called "Old Dowd" reported a grove of the big trees to his companions, and was piqued when they laughed at him. The West was full of tall stories in those days, and tales of trees soaring upward a distance of three hundred feet it seemed could only be the product of an over-active imagination. But Dowd knew what he had seen. He took a group of men on a hunting trip and managed to lure them into the big tree region. There they were humbled and awed by the majestic giants of the mountains, and these witnesses of the unbelievable soon spread the news of California's newest wonder.

First the gold-crazed Forty-Niners, and later genuine lumbermen, began to threaten the stillness, then the very existence, of the primeval forests by cutting the trees for lumber.

Redwood is wonderful for building purposes, beautiful of grain, handsome in color, easy to work, and durable to an extreme. Insects leave it alone, dampness rots it with interminable slowness. Good lumber has been taken from trunks that have lain in dampness for five hundred years.

The chief difficulty of lumbering redwood is the size of the tree. This is what saved them from the Indians, who never attempted to fell one of the giants. Early settlers cut them only occasionally, for the task of felling one with axes and handsaws was a gigantic one. Once fallen, one tree furnished enough good lumber to build a settlement.

Later, the lumber interests discovered this amazing source of profit, and began a systematic depletion of the forests. For a time the devastation, upon both redwood and big tree forests, was appalling. Then public-spirited citizens got together and succeeded in halting the slaughter. State parks were made of most of the groves, and those trees which are privately owned are also safe, because public opinion has come to regard the useless slaying of one of these giants as a deed just short of murder.

Sequoias, the oldest living things on earth, are being protected so that future generations also may marvel at these reminders of the antiquity of the world.

—Roger L. Rogers

COMING SOON!

The Sequel To

"Warrior of the Dawn"

By

HOWARD BROWNE

PROBLEMS of SCIENCE

By L. TAYLOR HANSEN

THE ENIGMA OF RIFTING

IN PREVIOUS articles of this series, it has been pointed out that geology is in the throes of a rebirth. New facts in the patterns of mountain-building, of great rifts and oceanic contours, as well as accumulating evidence in the distribution of ancient climates compared to modern climates, are pressing for explanations.

In a larger sense, none of the earth sciences can be divorced from geology, and thus, as if the modern geologist did not have enough problems of his own, new facts of plant and animal distribution press upon him from botany and zoology, which are strengthened or checked by parallel findings from the realm of parasitology.

We have also seen how geologists divide themselves into three groups: the conservatives who believe as our grandfathers did, that earth's mountain ranges are due to the shrinkage of the crust due to cooling (a probable factor), and that continents and oceans have always had their present location, thus explaining nothing; the bridge builders who would have land bridges rise and sink from continent to continent, thus explaining life migrations only; and the revolutionary theorists of continental displacement, or the drift of continental masses, who would explain many of the enigmas but become involved in other difficulties.

Two main theories of continental displacement have been offered to geologists, but neither seems to meet all the evidence of geological fact. In 1910, F. B. Taylor of Indiana Univ. published a theory of Equatorial Drift, in which he pictured two great land masses, one at the north and the other at the south. These were drawn together by an equatorial pull, and met at the line of the Mediterranean, piling up the Alpine-Himalayan Cordillera during the diastrophism which closed the Mesozoic (Age of Reptiles). As they drifted, theorized Taylor, they cracked open the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. While this seems to be an excellent explanation for the twisting of the bed of the Ancient Tethys Sea up to form the peaks of the Alps and such Himalayan peaks as Everest, nevertheless it does not seem to give an adequate explanation for the other transverse ranges such as the partially sunken Cape-Kerguelin running from the Argentine across the tip of Africa into the Indian, and the Appalachian-English Range.

Neither does it explain the Pacific Cordillera running down the Americas and along Antarctica to continue its circle of the Pacific Basin along the fiery Asian Islands. A further objection is raised in the element of time. How could the northern mass crash into the southern continent, known to geologists as Gondwanaland, during the beginning of the Tertiary, and acon later get back up under the pole so far that Greenland could become the center of the Pleistocene polar cap?

In 1924, A. Wegener of Germany offered another theory of continental displacement. He believed that at one time all continents formed one mass in which there was no Atlantic or Indian Ocean. Because of the rotation of the earth, or some other as yet unknown reason, this mass began to crack up, reasoned Wegener, and both parts started to drift westward. Assuming that the Americas moved at a more rapid rate than the rest of the mass, the American Cordillera was piled up on the forward moving wall, while the Atlantic and Indian Oceans were cracked open, beginning from the southern end. These tears reached the Mediterranean at the close of the Mesozoic but did not reach the Arctic until the Pleistocene when the glacial caps began to form in the north.

In a Symposium called by the Amer. Assn. of Petroleum Geologists to consider the question of continental displacement, and in particular the Wegener Theory of Western Drift, the following objections were offered to the sequences of Wegener: (1) If Western Drift explains the Rockies-Andes, it does not explain the rest of the Pacific Cordillera since mountains could hardly be formed by the advancing side of one continental shelf and the retreating side of the other. (2) The Theory of Western Drift does not explain the transverse ranges of the northern and southern hemispheres any better than Equatorial Drift. (3) Western Drift has no explanation for the Alpine-Himalayan Cordillera. (4) Wegener's Theory ignored the Ancient Tethys Sea altogether, which, as a geological fact, cannot be ignored. (5) Western Drift does not explain the twisting of the Tethys bed up to form the peaks of the Alpine-Himalayan Cordillera. (6) A closely closed Atlantic is not probable since the moraines of the glacial cap do not directly match nor do the folds

of the rocks between Labrador and England allow a direct match. A folded land of some five hundred miles width is missing between the rock folds of Labrador and those of England. (7) In order to make the sequences of Wegener possible, the Americas must move more rapidly than Eurasia, which is contrary to the laws of geophysics since the latter is the greatest body and should move farther on a deeper plane. Finally, (8) If the continents moved, what made them move?

These criticisms rained upon the displacement theories seem to have dulled the interest of geologists in the revolutionary hypothesis. However, the present writer is of the opinion that although the sequences as proposed by Taylor and Wegener are not of themselves entirely correct, yet the principle of continental displacement itself has not been refuted.

Using the criticisms as an aid to the further study of the problem, attention is called to the type of basin which the Atlantic Ocean presents, with its long winding Central Ridge. If the ocean in question could be half drained of its water, the long Central Ridge would dry off and again become land. Here is the probable location of the missing five hundred miles of folded land which would supply the absent portion of the transverse mountain range and glacial moraine. However, was this ever land? A study of Atlantic lavas and seismic patterns seems to suggest it. Still more suggestive are the winding gorges

of Atlantic rivers which cut across their shelves and turn into the closed basins of the deeps. Several theories have been offered to explain them but the most logical seems to be the rapid withdrawal of oceanic waters, and even more rapid refilling, thus preserving the features of a steep topography far down under the sea. The fact that these canyons are world-wide shows this withdrawal to have taken place on a planetary scale.

The most obvious explanation to the geologist for such a mass withdrawal of oceanic water is the glacial cap. As for the rapid refilling, we have the, as yet, sudden onset of the interglacial. Marsden Manson who once put forth a theory of crustal rupture on such a scale that the oceans would be suddenly heated, thus ensuring a reversal of climates for a cold region, strangely enough failed to connect his theory with the phenomena of the interglacial, which has always been one of the greatest enigmas of geology.

In Article Three, the present writer put forth the theory that the northern glacial may have been heavier and more extensive than now believed, thus locking up greater amounts of oceanic water while a rifting of the crust under the load, such as must have taken place when the cracks of the Atlantic reached the Arctic, would have rapidly melted back the glacial cap, thus bringing on the warm interglacial with its palms in England.

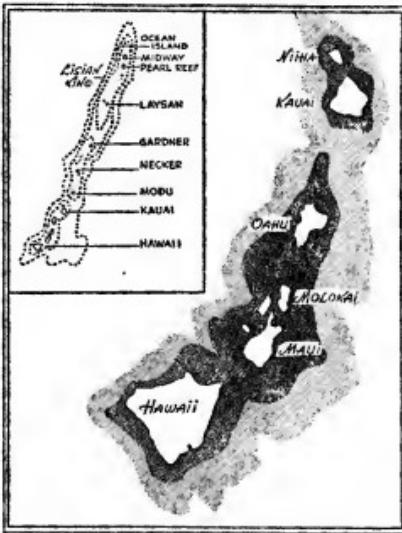


FOR this article, I posed the question: If the land under the glacial cracked open, and allowed the lava to heat the rift sea or lakes of the Atlantic to such an extent that the ice melted off and palm trees again came back to England, what caused the crust to rupture in the first place?

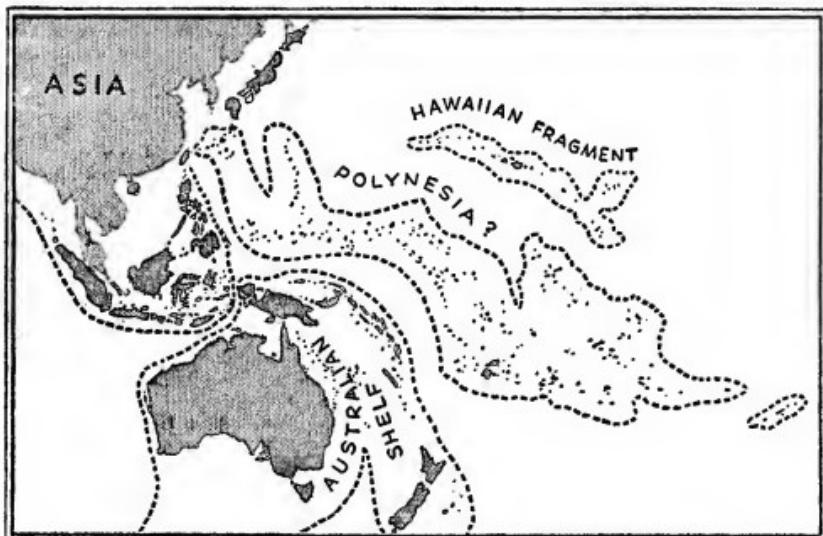
For the study of this subject, it is necessary that we take up rifting, one of the greatest enigmas of geology. Rifting and its cause is as yet little understood by science, but its importance is such that when someday it is fully comprehended, humanity will be far more enlightened about the past history, and the future destiny of this planet, upon which we all find ourselves as passengers, drifting through space.

Geology is the science with the magic touch. It takes the cut in the old hill, which we have passed a thousand times blindly, and reveals it as a hook of the ancient past which no man before us has discovered. That layer of round stones was placed when the hill was a stream-bed bringing water from high mountains, but the sand above it, grading to silt and shale shows that the streams have become a quiet lake. Above that, the blue and grey ash foretells the layer of old lava, all deposited before the record was twisted and gnarled in the period of folding.

Unlike this record of the old hill, the rift is a great topographical feature. One of its marks is a



Map of the Hawaiian Shelf. Inset is the entire reef, 1500 miles long, extending from Ocean and Midway to Hawaii. After Bumstead in the National Geographic for Feb., 1924.



According to Daly, the Pacific floor shows evidence of wrinkling and of rifting off due to tensional cracks. Here we see the Hawaiian Fragment and the Australian Shelf, and possibly, Polynesia.

line of abrupt cliffs called a scarp. Such a line is the eastern face of the Sierras. On their western slopes these mountains climb gradually to such high peaks as Whitney, but on their eastern face, they shoot up like a giant wall from the flatness of the desert.

Another mark of the rift is a series of valleys, often parallel or lying end to end. These depressions usually have bodies of water in them which have no outlets.

There are two general schools of thought concerning rifting, but like so many geological theories which their authors argue, they do not seem to be entirely mutually exclusive, but rather different phases of the same phenomenon. Bailey Willis of Stanford in his articles on "Metamorphic Orogeny and Continental Genesis," suggested that tidal and rotational forces seem to have developed many diagonally oriented zones of strain in the crust of the earth. Indeed it is to be noted that many of the great earth rifts have a northwest-southeast trend.

Willis reasons that these trends favor the collection and ponding of lava, brought on by the rising of the hot magma from below the crust, and the remelting of the local rock. Now because of the heat of this local pocket, the surrounding rock is being metamorphized (its crystals are thus rearranged) which brings about the formation of new minerals. As these minerals grow largely upon the horizontal plane, they exert a tremendous lateral pressure upon the crack. Such asthenoliths tend to erupt along their edge while

the center collapses, says Willis, and might occur either upon continental areas or under the oceans. Active asthenoliths are marked by deeps "characterized by great seismic activity and beside which rise great mountain chains of volcanic or intrusive formations."

R. A. Daly of Harvard, on the other hand, has his mind upon the old river valley. The slit and gravel laden flow of such rivers, says Daly, are dropping an added load upon the crust. This causes the hardened crust under the river, to sink into the hot, glassy magma upon which the crust rests. Tensional cracks then develop, and along them the burning liquid works upward, remelting the lower rocks and finally causing fragments of sial to founder.¹ Now if such a crack develops where strains are the result of the uneven advance of a continental mass toward an ocean basin, such as The Great Sierran Fault (whose eastern lip is on the other side of The Great Basin Country), then block faulting would result. (Block faulting is the tipping of entire continental blocks. Half-Dome in the Yosemite was caused by block faulting. So were the Sierras and probably the Channel Islands off the California coast.)

¹ Founder is an expression used by geologists for the sinking of a sialic fragment so deeply into the magma that it has been lost.

In the western part of the United States there is much evidence of block faulting. Some blocks are tipped at various angles and others dropped.

It is easy to see that Daly has the Pacific Ocean in mind, and in particular, the western United States, for he goes on to say that if such a continental mass riding toward an ocean basin would advance unevenly, the forward portions moving with more rapidity, then tensional cracks would develop parallel to the shoreline.

In his "Floor of the Ocean," Daly mentions the strength of the Pacific floor which is great enough to carry the load of the Hawaiian volcano, and yet seems to be wrinkling before the continental wall. If an advancing continental mass would meet a rather rigid oceanic floor, continues Daly, the mass would be expected to ride out over the floor for a distance, giving the impression of a steadily rising coastline, until the deeply basined rocks would remelt and the hot magma work up through the tensional cracks, causing a portion to rift off.

Dr. Daly, one of the best scientific minds of our time, has stressed again to the present writer in personal correspondence, his belief in the great strength of the Pacific Basin, although it does seem to be folding slowly before the continental walls.

Much research on the earth's lavas has also been done by this same scientist. The deepest lavas of the earth surround the Pacific ocean says Daly. Upon the other hand, the lavas of the Atlantic show that they have torn their way to the surface through an old continental platform. This same fact is true of Sumatra and Borneo. Is it not strange that the tiny island of Ascension in the Atlantic and large Sumatra and Borneo of the Pacific all have bits of continental granite buried in their respective lavas—bits which geologists call "granitic bombs"?

In criticism of Daly's theory of rifting, one might say that while it gives a remarkably clear and comprehensive idea of what is happening along the Pacific, it does not explain the rifting of the Atlantic or the Indian. However, by combining the theories of Daly and Willis, the present writer would like to present his theory of what happened in the Atlantic.

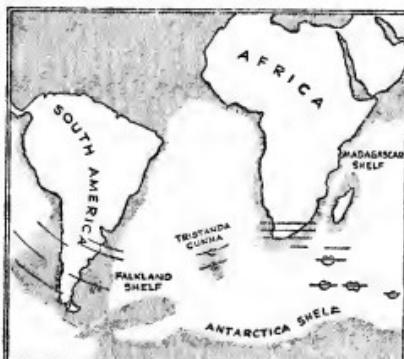
Since we know that there was an Ancient Tethys Sea, we must postulate at least two continents before the end of the Age of the Great Reptiles. In the northern mass, two large river systems took their rise in the Appalachian-English Mountain range and coursed through parallel gorges to the Tethys Sea. One ran to the east and one to the west of the Atlantic Ridge. All the other rivers of the Atlantic were tributaries of them, except the Baltic River which turned north around the edge of Scotland. Today the old river channels carved under the sea all wind to the south. Perhaps other rivers from the Central Ridge joined the Great East and West Rivers, but we must wait for a more comprehensive mapping by the new seeing eye of radar to learn about that.

Partly through the weight of their silt-laden beds, but largely from other great tensional forces, which we will discuss later, the river beds became

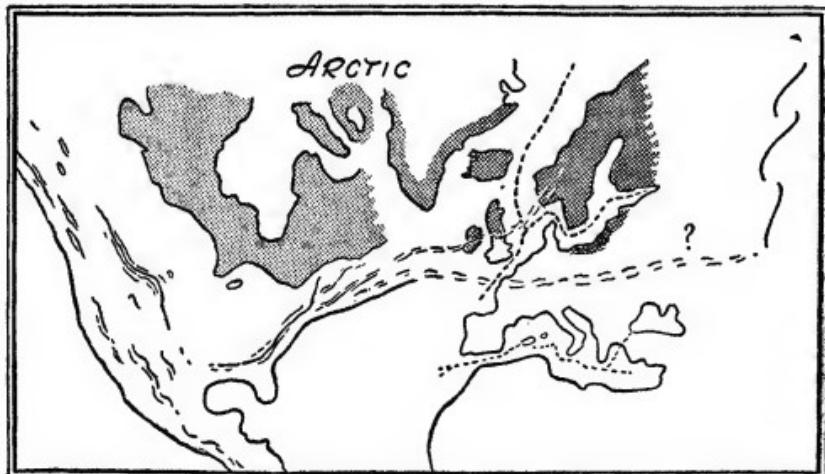
two paralleled rifts, tearing open from the southern end. Forces described by both Daly and Willis were factors in the rending of the Atlantic, only in this case, the continental shelves upon each side seemed to be moving away from the Central Ridge.

GRAT continental movements such as this do not happen overnight. They go on for uncounted millions of years. When the Atlantic was a double river system, the horse was still no larger than a dog, and perhaps, in the low-lying swamps of the Central Ridge, a few giant dinosaurs lingered on from the last age of earth-history, while man was not yet quite human. In the Oligocene when Dr. Broom² finds the first evidence of man's almost human ancestor, the Atlantic waters probably invaded the two river systems from the reopened Tethys Sea, but during the long Miocene when man was fast developing a good brain, the forests of America marched in a wide front across the unbroken Atlantic into

² Dr. Broom differs from Gregory and others in his belief that the Hominidae arose from an early terrestrial stock perhaps allied to *Propliopithecus* of the lower Oligocene, and regards the resemblances of later anthropoids and man as due to parallel evolution. In all this assemblage of data which Dr. Broom presents in his book, none is more interesting than the discovery at Sterkfontein, the site of the *Plesianthropus* discovery, of a fauna suggesting upper Pliocene. If this is true then *Australopithecus* which is definitely older, must be referred to middle or lower Pliocene. Dr. Loren C. Eiseley writing in "Science," news weekly for the Amer. Assn. for Adv. of Science says, "Every treatment of this subject in the anthropological textbooks will have to be revised in the light of these lowered dates. . . . Dr. Broom belongs to that high company of pioneers whose discoveries leave an indelible impress upon the science of their time and often remodel its dogmas."



Fragments of a mountain chain now drowned. The chain is pre-tertiary. It shows twisting of South America.



The old Appalachian-English Chain on the old shield. The Archean Shield and the Proterozoic Cordillera. Compiled from Dolly, Done, Chamberlain and Salisbury.

Europe. At this time the rivers were certainly not wide enough to stop the spread of the trees, but it is probable that before the fiery Miocene was over, the double Atlantic tear was in active operation, creeping up slowly from the southern sea.

On March 25th, 1947, during the national convention of The Society of Exploration Geophysicists in Los Angeles, Calif., Dr. Frank Rieber,³ of the Rieber Research Laboratory, N. Y. gave a lecture entitled, "It Is Earlier Than You Think." During the course of this talk, he described some of the miracles which some of us may live to see in the world of science. One was an instrument by means of which we could actually look down through the rocks below us and see the bend and twist of these layers of the crust.

In our imagination let us take one of these instruments and apply it to the Atlantic so that a cross-section of that ocean will focus within our view. At the same time, we will have to compress time as well as space for an understanding of what happened.

There will be nothing extraordinary about the crust section which we view during the early Miocene. It will be dented by the gorges of a double river system. The gorges are deep and the scenery is wild and beautiful. It had not always been so. Probably during the time of the great reptiles these were swamps through which sluggish green rivers oozed their way, but in the meantime, the land below the rivers had been

pushed up, the swamps drained and the rivers now ate their way down through thousands of feet of steep, rocky gorges. At times they widened into large lakes, and this happened more frequently as they neared the southern sea which we shall still call the Tethys.

As the Miocene continued, tensional forces of great power were still bowing up the land. If the forces were steady enough the rocks bent before them forming higher mountains, but if the forces were too strong and sharp or the crust too rigid, then cracks began to form. The gorges being zones of weakness, invited these cracks, and the hot magma began to well through the cuts.

Now whenever much magma is erupted, the base is removed from some nearby sialic block and it is dropped. Or perhaps, the magma moves in giant waves, exceedingly slowly, of course, thousands of years from crest to trough. However, a case in point is the history of the Great Basin during the Miocene. At the start of this period, one giant mountain range existed from Colorado to the Sierras, but as the period progressed, the lovely mountainous country of Idaho and Washington began to crack open. Lava poured out so heavily that it covered the tops of the mile-high mountains. Soon thereafter, the crest of the western range began to sink. It continued to sink until we have today the vast rift known as "The Great Basin" country lying east of the Sierran wall. (Schuchert and Dunbar estimated the Miocene lava of Idaho to Columbia to have a volume of 24,000 cubic miles.)

As the Miocene proceeded, tremendous volcanoes opened their throats about the Atlantic. The lava which they belched into the heavens probably was drawn from the rocks surrounding

³Dr. Rieber said we were entering upon the threshold of the electronic age, but as yet we were only in the stage of communicating by dots and dashes.

the cracks, from under the great river beds and adjacent areas. Some of it was probably drained from under the slowly widening continental shelves, and from under the Central Ridge.

One of the first lessons we learn in geology is that all such orogenic or volcanic convulsions seem to be rhythmical in character. Millions of years of peaceful quiet such as the earth experienced during the Oligocene was shattered by the fury of the "fairy Miocene." But the Miocene finally wore itself out.

Thus the strain having had its release, the cracks healed with the cooling lava. The river gorges were now two narrow inland seas. The forests came back to the blackened land and across the land bridge to the north which the great peaks of the Appalachian-English Mountains still afforded, the animals and man crossed back and forth from continent to continent.

The generations of men passed too quickly for them to probably even record in legend that the climate was slowly cooling for this was the Pliocene. More ice than usual began to form on the peaks of the northern range, but if it was a trifle heavier than in the day of his great-great-grandfather, it probably went unnoticed. Our ancestor had too much trouble simply obtaining food to worry about that. However, the Pleistocene dawned with increasing ice, and increasing ice not only meant cooler climates but also lower oceanic shorelines.

THE EQUATORIAL STRATOSPHERE

IT IS a surprising fact that the stratosphere is colder over the equator than over any other part of the world, even the polar regions.

The stratosphere, also called the isothermal or constant temperature region, is that area of the atmosphere beyond the limits of vertical convection of heat from the earth. Up to the stratosphere, an altitude of ten to twelve kilometers above sea level, the temperature continuously decreases. When the point is reached where absorption of heat equals radiation, the temperature of the atmosphere remains constant.

It has been discovered that the stratosphere begins at higher levels, and is colder, over equatorial regions than over other parts of the earth. In most places the stratospheric temperature is about 55° below zero, Centigrade; over the equator the average temperature is 70° below.

The intensity of radiation from the earth, and intervening water vapor, seem to be the determining factors in the temperature of the stratosphere. Over the equator, there is a strong upward movement of the atmosphere, with no extensive areas of descending air, and many types of cloud formations are always present. These absorb radiation from the earth up to a great altitude.

Most of the radiation which reaches the stratosphere from this region, therefore, comes from the clouds and water vapor, and these being

As the glacial spread and the shoreline dropped, much of the drowned land began to reappear. Again its mantle of forest came back, and again our ancestor probably hunted through its shade. But he did not have our magic instrument, nor our perspective, so he could not know that one day the fiery death from below the earth would come again, and then after many thousand years of quiet, yet again, until there would be no vast, white mountains to the north, and no Central Ridge.

Thus our instrument has compressed for us several thousand miles of space and some ten or twelve million years of time. Yet we must admit, although the picture of what happened does seem to be much plainer, yet we have still not answered the question of "Why"?

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very big and consequently very cold, the intensity of the radiation from them is probably quite feeble. Because of the prevalence of large cloud areas over the equator, a good deal of the earth-heat finds outlet horizontally, increasing radiation in extra-tropical regions.

Thus it is that the regions of the earth having the highest temperatures, lie beneath the lowest temperatures in the stratosphere. —Pete Bogg

MODERN LEMURIANS

BEAUTIFUL Mount Shasta in California has always been clothed in an awesome air of mystery. Stories have long been circulated that in some remote fastness at the mountain's base dwells a race of Lemurians.

It is said that from Lemuria, that prehistoric continent which eons ago vanished beneath the Pacific Ocean, came a remnant of the inhabitants, who established themselves upon the new continent which we now call America. In some secluded area at Shasta's feet the last descendants of the ancient Lemurians may still today be finding peace and plenty and protection. Many people have searched for the spot, but if discovered, its secret has been kept.

Nevertheless, rumors keep recurring of tall, dignified personages seen on nearby highways and village streets who are none other than members of the mystic clan; and of strange boats which glide into Pacific shores and then rise into the air, to disappear near Shasta. —R. Dee

The CLUB HOUSE

Conducted by ROG PHILLIPS

Where science fiction fan clubs get together

IT MAY come as a pleasant surprise to some of you readers that there is a large number of organized science fiction and fantasy fan clubs in existence, not only in the United States, but also in Canada and the British Isles.

To others of you it will come as a surprise that these have existed in one form or another almost since fantasy first rated a monthly magazine all by itself. Every reader of science fiction sooner or later wishes he knew someone with a similar taste with whom he could discuss his likes and dislikes and DO something about them.

Well, there are many like you. They hold conventions every year to vote on their favorite authors, discuss subjects of interest in the field of science fiction, and have a good time in general.

They publish what they call *fanzines*. These fanzines discuss to a large extent the current *prozines*. (A prozine is a science fiction magazine such as *Amazing Stories*.) They also carry on discussions of all stf (scientifiction) subjects, whether found in newspapers, books, prozines, or elsewhere. They offer back issues of prozines for sale or trade, give you a market for those old prozines in the attic that you don't want (some of them are worth as high as twenty-five dollars on the open market today!).

But best of all they make your love of stf LIVE for you. Why? Because it lives for them! It lives for them because it is the frontier of the advance of civilization, the dark backwash on the shore of the Infinite. A century ago the spiritual counterparts of fandom of today turned their eyes westward to the vast Unknown that was the west. They heard and obeyed the call of the beckoning horizon.

Today well dressed people drive out to the historical markers that are the tombstones of our past. They read the inscriptions which tell of the brave deeds or tragedies that were enacted on those spots, then drive on. Adventure for them is dead.

Yes, it's almost a half century since a white man was scalped by an Indian. Today the Frontier is science. Then, the advance scout rode through rich valleys, over high mountains, and often lost himself in the vast badlands and deserts of the west, while those that came after

bim settled in the rich valleys and tilled the soil. Now, the stf fan roams the rich valleys of solid science and climbs the mountains and explores the badlands of future science and the Unknown.

If you've waded this far you are one of these fans. If you don't subscribe to one of the many fanzines, if you have never made any contact with the *actifans*, you SHOULD. You're missing something you should have.

Why? Well, you pick up a copy of *Amazing Stories* and maybe other magazines on the newsstand and take them home to read. When you are through you throw them away or put them on the book shelf. But you don't forget what you have read. You have been looking through the eyes of men and women whose minds are unfettered by the ties of actuality. You have taken a journey into the Unknown. You are different now than the fellow next door who doesn't read *Amazing Stories*.

You can still talk his language, but he can't talk yours. You must turn to fandom to find friends who talk about the things you are interested in.

Again, there are many stories that appeared in one magazine or another in years past which are now classics of science fiction and fantasy. Where can you find the back issues that have them? Your local second hand magazine man is ALWAYS out of science fiction magazines! In the pages of the various fanzines you will find these back issues for sale. You will also find a ready market for that stack of stf magazines in your garage that you've been planning to burn or give away.

What does somebody else think of that story that you thought was terrible? You see the stack of *Amazing Stories* on the drug store magazine stand dwindle to nothing and know that there MUST be lots of people who read it as avidly as you do. Who are they? Where do they live?

You can find the answer to all your questions in fandom and its fanzines. There may be an old time actifan in your own city or town who has a collection of *promags* that fills a room, and who puts out a *fanmag* every month. There may be ten or twenty fans who meet regularly once a

month in your city, without your knowing anything about it!

They have a get-together and play games, eat sandwiches, drink coffee, and discuss the current issues of their favorite magazines. Maybe they have a real live author who makes a speech and autographs a copy of the magazine that has one of his stories in for you.

And all that may be going on only three blocks down the street while you sit home wishing there was something interesting to do!

Well, this fan department is going to correct that.

FOR ALL of you readers of *Amazing Stories* there are fanzines to fit your tastes and desires. Believe me, you are missing something if you don't join fandom in one way or another!

That is why this department has been added to *Amazing Stories*; so that the thousands of you whom we know would LIKE to do something active about your hobby can know where to turn for what you want.

I'm going to give a list of the (fan magazines) *fanzines* at the end of this article; but first I would like to give a general picture of what they are, who publishes them and way, and what you may expect from them.

The average fanzine is published by one man or two or three men, with seven or eight regular contributors in some cases, who religiously read everything of interest and comment on it.

It is mimeographed usually (though some fanzines are lithographed, and a very few are printed like a promag). It isn't very big, containing seldom more than twenty pages.

It is printed by someone who makes no attempt to make money on it, publishing it as a hobby only. If it costs you ten or fifteen cents a copy it probably comes to you with a three cent stamp on it, is run out on a machine operated by a crank rather than an electric motor, and is on paper that is bought retail.

You guessed it. It's a hard job with no money in it. One stencil on the average mimeo machine will run not more than three hundred copies. That means that most of the fanzines I will list will be forced to turn down subscriptions after the three hundred mark is reached, because to go on would mean the editor would have to devote all his spare time to the chore of printing. Therefore I suggest that you pick the fanzine you would like to take and subscribe NOW. Otherwise you might get your money back with a "Sorry, no more subscriptions accepted at present."

Now here's something VERY important. The average fanzine editor is *not* rich. Give him a break. If you write him and want a reply, enclose a stamp. It's only three cents to you, but it might be three or six hard-earned bucks to him in a month when all the letters are added up.

The average fanmag is published because the editor and a few of his close friends have a com-

mon love, science fiction, and enjoy doing something about their love together. They may work at anything from grave digging to managing a huge corporation in the daytime, but at night they gather in the basement near the mimeo machine and work together and get a lot of satisfaction out of it.

Keep that picture in mind.

These fellows have their likes and dislikes just like all of us. They are wrong sometimes, right a lot of the time, wise a little of the time, and foolish and thoughtless once in a while just like me or you.

But they're having a lot of fun and getting a lot of satisfaction out of their hobby. They'll welcome you with open arms if you meet them in the right spirit. And they'll work their heads off to make you feel at home in fandom.

Actually, you can close your eyes and stick a pin in the list of fanzines I'm going to give, and the chances are a hundred to one you'll thoroughly enjoy every page of the fanzine the pin picks out for you! It's as simple as that.

However, each fanzine editor has a little different idea of what he should stress in his zine. He usually tries to include everything you'd want, but stresses one or two things more than others. I'll try, so far as possible, to give you an idea of what you may expect from each, so that you may choose a little more discriminately and stand a better chance of getting what you want out of fandom, whether it is a chance to mix socially with kindred spirits and argue about favorite authors or magazines, or a medium where you can add to your collection of back numbers of magazines or get rid of that stack in the attic.

Nearly every one of the fanzines on the market will have to refuse to accept new subscribers after they get 250 or 300, because to accept more would mean they would have to make a second set of stencils and spend many extra hours getting the fanzine in the mail.

There are roughly fifty fanzines being published. The AVERAGE one could handle only a hundred more subscribers than it now has. That means that fandom can only take in five thousand more recruits at present.

It's an unfortunate predicament, but one that can't be helped. *Amazing Stories* is printed on a press a block long. That press can run out half a million copies of *Amazing Stories* as easily as a hundred. A fanzine is printed on a mimeograph run by hand, with each sheet of paper fed by hand. And by a fellow who works all day in order to earn a living, and prints his magazine after dinner.

So, if you wait around a few months before subscribing to a fanzine you will probably be out of luck, for the time being, at least. And this time next year when a year's subscription expires and is dropped, what'll you have? That's right. A chance to subscribe to one of the fanzines that somebody else decided wasn't any good, so he didn't renew.

Fanzines contain all sorts of things a promag can't print, such as comparisons of various promags, FRANK discussions of authors, and darn good literary attempts of the readers themselves, as well as lively discussions and arguments on everything connected with science fiction activities.

This column will offer a prize contest in fandom during 1948. A fifty dollar cash prize, a twenty-five dollar cash prize, and ten one-year subscriptions to *Amazing Stories*, offered by this department to encourage reader participation in fandom. The details aren't worked out yet; but the contest will take the form of an elimination contest among the fanzines themselves for the most outstanding letter or article appearing in each fanzine by one of its subscribers, with the prize for that up to the fanzine editor himself, while the winners of the national contest will be chosen from the winners of the elimination contest.

And now to the fanzines themselves. I can't tell anything about those I don't get copies of, so, fanzine editors, fire them at me from every direction, whether they're a load of buckshot or a garland of roses.

DREAM QUEST: 10c, 13 for \$1.00; Don Wilson, 495 N. 3rd St., Banning, Cal., gets honor position this month because—well, it was Don's appeal on behalf of fandom that brought about this column to acquaint you readers with the publications of the actifans, their conventions, etc.

Its 20 to 40 pages 8½x11 in. contain futuristic illustrations by Howard Miller, its associate editor, interesting articles, some serious and some not so serious, by whoever writes them, and that means YOU, if you subscribe, and want to see something of yours published. It has a letter column called Cave of the Winds. Don's editorial is called The Gas Jet. Another regular department in DQ is Pro-Phile, a review of the contents of current prozines.

FANDOM SPEAKS: 10c, 12 for \$1.00; Rex Ward and Jack Clements, eds., 428 Main St., El Segundo, Cal.; is ten pages of 8½x14 in., containing nothing but letters. The fans call such a fanzine a *letter-zine*. There's plenty of excitement all the time in this letterzine put out by Rex and Jack, and lots of interest. It's one of the quickest ways to get really acquainted with fandom, and also one of the quickest ways to break into it actively yourself! Don Wilson, editor of Dream Quest, has a letter in it all the time, and he seems to put more into his letter for Fandom Speaks than he does into his own editorials in his own zine!

FANTASY-TIMES: 10c, 12 for \$1.00; James V. Taurasi, ed. in chief, with nine contributing editors, all of high caliber, one of them being Dr. Gardner, Ph.D., an outstanding scientist who is noted for his researches into longevity and the roll of vitamins, etc., in it. Address: 101-02 Northern Blvd., Corona, New York.

Mr. Taurasi asked me to tell you readers just to send a dime for one issue, because you might

not like the zine, and he is near his peak circulation now, so would rather sell it only to those who will get some good out of it. Al Brown, one of the associate editors of it passed through Chicago recently and told me that Jimmy would go litho if he got enough subscribers.

You can take it from me that Fantasy-Times has plenty to hold your interest. Just the same, if you send a buck, better enclose a stamp too. Why? Because if Jimmy can't go litho, and he can only take fifty more subscribers but gets a couple hundred bucks he has to return—there goes his chance of breaking even on the new subscribers if he has to spend it all on stamps.

LUNACY: 5c copy, 1115 San Anselmo Ave., San Anselmo, Cal.; George Caldwell, ed. A thoroughly healthy fanzine catering to the youngsters (under 90 and without ulcers). Gawge says, "My motto is, To hell with fandom. We're a bunch of louses." And every one of the fourteen pages of Lunacy is full of interest and fun. No dignity, but dignity would spoil it.

THE KAY-MAR TRADER: 5c copy; K. Martin Carlson, ed., Moorhead, Minn., stresses advertising of back issues of prozines for sale or exchange. At present an index of the works of various fantasy authors is appearing with KMT, by Darrell Richardson, which seems to be really worth while. Is some author your favorite and would you like to read all his stories? Richardson's index will tell you, and the KMT advertising section will tell you where you can get the back issues containing this author's stories, so you can read them all.

On the 5c per copy zines, send them half a buck and get ten issues.

SINE NOMEN: 5c. "A disreputable rag published, edited, and financed by John Van Couvering. Destructive criticism tendered by my mother." So says Van. He goes on to say on his editorial page, "Contributions and subscriptions should be sent to me, at 902 N. Downey Ave., Downey, Cal. . . . Don't hurry . . . I've done without 'em so far . . ." On page one he adds, "A little hektograph trouble also placed a drag on my efforts. Too cheap to buy a can of refill, I waited until Rex Ward (of Fandom Speaks), over in El Segundo, got a mimeo and threw his hektograph out the window. I raided El Segundo garbage cans for a week until I found it and scraped out the gel."

I'd better stop looking at it or I'll reprint the wholeish. Twenty pages full of fun and interesting subjects, and in my opinion he'd better raise his price to a dime even though it's a hektograph job, because he'll lose too much money. He's good, and I hope about a hundred of you send him a buck. Then he can buy a Speed-O-Print and put out a zine worthy of his very evident ability. And raise your price to a dime a copy, Van.

THE GORGON: 15c, 75c per yr., bi-monthly. Stanley Mullen, ed., 4930 Grove St., Denver 11, Colorado. Somebody (I don't remember who) told me this is the aristocrat of fanzines. All I have to say to that is, quote, "Poo, I could have found that out without being told." Unquote.

Eighty pages, it HAS to be bi-monthly, because it must take two months to get it together. No ads. The illustrations are professional looking. The contents guarantee hours of entertaining reading.

SNIX: 10c; 4 for 25c, Walter A. Coslet, Box 6, Helena, Montana. "Coswal" is a very serious fan, and puts out a zine that is a must for all fans who want to build up a reference library of science fiction and fantasy. Coswal signed up a lifetime contract for a managing editor recently (August 12th, '47 at 7:30 P.M.). Congratulations! Let's hope that as the years roll by Providence provides you with enough assistant editors to take care of increasing circulation.

FANTASY ADVERTISER: 10c, 50c per year; Gus Wilmorth, ed., 643 S. Bixel St., Los Angeles 14, Cal. "The amateur professional for the professional amateur." That really describes it, too. It's printed by professional printers, contains ads for the sale trade and exchange of back issue prozines galore. Also has a large center section of interesting current fan events plus some really startling art work. Herman the Vermin, on page 6 of the October '47 issue, is equal to the most fantastic of all characters out of Li'l Abner.

SPACEWARP: Arthur H. Rapp, 2120 Bay St., Saginaw, Mich.; 10c, \$1.00 per yr. Twenty pages of entertainment in the form of amateur short fantasies, articles, and controversies on current interests—the current one being the pro and con on Lovecraft. Done in blue, red, and green ink, you see such fantasies as a blue beer mug with red foam, on a green background! Current want of Rapp is a one sentence definition of science fiction. Reader participation wanted.

FANEWS: 3c per sheet, 40 for a buck. Published

whenever the news warrants it, by Walter Dunkelburger (Dunk) at 1443 Fourth Ave. S., Fargo, N. D. Devoted entirely to fan news when it is fresh. Dunk also publishes other things, like Dunk's Scrap Book, which will be discussed in future columns.

FANTASY COMMENTATOR: 25c copy, 5 for \$1.00. Quarterly. A Langley Searles' ed., with 5 assistants. "Covering the field of imaginative literature . . . although FC publishes no fiction, descriptive and critical manuscripts dealing with any phase of imaginative literature are welcome from all readers. A detailed history of fandom by Sam Moskowitz is now drawing to a close in it. Subscriptions limited, so enclose a stamp when you send your buck. 19 E. 235th St., N. Y. City 66.

There are lots more, but that's all the room I dare take this time. Next month I'll tell about the two major fan organizations in fandom, the NFFF (National Fantasy Fan Federation) and FAPA (Fantasy Amateur Press Association). Most fans soon join the NFFF, and most fan editors and writers belong to the NFFF and FAPA also. Once a year the NFFF holds a convention where all actifans meet one another and have a swell time—but I'll save that for next time.

Fancerely,

—Rog Phillips

How about you other readers? Have you a fan group in your locality? Do you, too, publish a fanmag? Why not send your "news" to Mr. Phillips. Letters addressed in care of this magazine will be forwarded to him.—The Editors.

ICE BELOW ZERO

By

CARTER T. WAINWRIGHT

ICE thickens faster at zero temperatures than it does at twenty or thirty degrees below zero. That may sound unreasonable, but under certain conditions it is true.

The temperature of the water just below a sheet of ice is always at freezing temperature, thirty-two degrees Farenheit. The ice, of course, grows thicker at this under surface. The rate at which the ice grows is proportional to the rate of heat loss from the water through the sheet of ice. When the upper surface of the ice becomes colder, the rate increases, but it decreases as the ice becomes thick, for the ice is a poor conductor of heat.

If fine snow covers the ice, it is a much poorer conductor of heat, one hundred to three hundred times worse, in fact. Therefore, even the thinnest layer of snow over ice greatly slows up the growth of the ice sheet by decreasing the loss of heat from the water, through the ice, to the cold air above.

When the temperature falls to twenty or more

degrees below zero, the wind is usually still, and any snow which covers the ice remains there and is not blown away by the wind, thus retaining the insulation which prevents the ice from thickening.

At these low temperatures, also, there often occurs, on large bodies of fresh water such as the Great Lakes, a condition called ice smoke. Over the open, deep water, frozen fog appears, which drifts across the ice formed over shallower water. This frosty substance is the ice smoke, and it acts as an insulating cover to the ice.

The ice smoke occurs in abundance at excessively cold temperatures, and in lesser quantities when the temperature is around zero. What does appear then is apt to be blown away, the same as snow, by the winds which are more common at zero temperatures than at twenty below. Thus, again, without the insulation of the ice smoke, the ice grows more rapidly at zero than it does when the temperature is much colder.

THE END

THE MYSTERY OF THE PASSENGER PIGEON

WHAT caused the disappearance of the passenger pigeon? Why did a whole species suddenly vanish from the earth? The passing of these birds is one of the unsolved mysteries of the nineteenth century.

Although wholesale slaughter by the white man accounts for the death of many of the pigeons, it does not explain the remarkable fact that in the short space of twenty years, the species became totally extinct. In 1875 the passenger pigeon population numbered into the billions; by 1900 there were none.

Pioneers in the Middle West were accustomed to seeing great flocks of passenger pigeons flying across the sky. The bird was described as being exceedingly elegant in plumage, form and movement. The adult was about sixteen inches in length, its upper parts bluish grey, its under parts white and light brown. The birds fed, roosted, nested and migrated in colonies.

Their characteristic migrations gave these pigeons the name of "passenger". They migrated from one locality to another, not because of weather changes, but in search of new supplies of food; hence their migratory movements were not regular and seasonal, but entirely dependent upon the food supply. Sometimes they remained in one locality for several years. A nesting place would be established, and as nearby food supplies became exhausted, daily flights of dozens of miles would be made, with a return each night to the same roosting place. The sound of countless wings beating into camp each evening was like that of a tornado, or a great waterfall. The birds settled on tree limbs for the night, in such numbers that often branches broke beneath the weight of the resting birds.

When food supplies became inadequate and it was necessary to change their nesting place, the birds rose into the air in a single flock and flew rapidly and powerfully, perhaps several hundred miles in a day, until they found a new nesting spot. It was these mass migrations which presented such a spectacular sight to the pioneers throughout most of the United States east of the Rockies, but chiefly in the Middle West, from Kentucky to Minnesota. The living mass darkened the sky for hours, in shades of blues, wines and white, and was a wonderful and astonishing sight. The birds flew at a speed of about sixty miles an hour. The flock in motion was often a mile or more wide, flowing across the sky in unbroken rhythm like a great river for three or four hours at a time, until all the multitude had passed.

Human imagination is staggered at the thought of the numbers of individual birds which made up one of these enormous flocks, and even more so at the numbers which made up the whole population of the species. Observers have estimated that many flocks contained over a billion birds; some contained more than two billion.

The amount of food required by these feathered

creatures is as incredible as their numbers. Each one consumed about a cupful of food daily. A flock consisting of a billion birds needed about eight million bushels of food a day. Originally, they fed on forest "mast", acorns, beechnuts, and so on. Considering their vast numbers, and the rapidity of their increase, it was assumed by most observers that only the gradual elimination of the forests would ever decrease the numbers of the passenger pigeons. The fact is that the destruction of the forests had only begun in 1880, when the last large flight of pigeons was witnessed.

For decades before this there had been great destruction of the birds by the white men, sometimes for sport, or for food, or by wrathful farmers whose fields had been devastated by the hungry hordes. The Midwest was becoming well settled by the middle of the nineteenth century, and the birds had discovered the fields of grain on the new farms. The settlers were up in arms against the menace to their livelihood of these voracious birds, no matter how admirable a sight they might present on the wing. The farmer and his family found that it was not easy to defend a field. Firing guns and beating on pans would intimidate the birds but slightly, and innumerable gusts of them would sweep in to devour the precious newly sprouted seeds.

The farmers welcomed the help of the curious, and of the professional hunters, who helped them by destroying the young birds in the nesting areas. Some enterprising pioneers drove hogs to the nesting grounds to fatten upon the pigeons which were easily slaughtered there. Others killed birds by the thousands for the Eastern markets. A skilled "pigeoneer", as these professional hunters were called, could take two thousand or more birds in a single day.

Despite all efforts of irate settlers and those who killed the birds for the purpose of marketing them, it was estimated that less than a million a year were marketed, and probably about that number otherwise eliminated from the flocks. Since a single flight sometimes contained two billion birds, it is apparent that the destruction of birds by the white man was not an important factor in the extermination of the species.

After about 1880 the immense flights of the past were seen no more. Scattered groups of the birds were noted from time to time, but that was all. Ornithologists, finally anticipating the unbelievable end of the passenger pigeon, offered rewards for undisturbed pigeons' nests. There was very little response. A few birds were captured for zoos, but these eventually died of old age, leaving no posterity. For reasons and in a manner unknown to man, the vast flocks of uncounted billions of beautiful birds have ceased to be. The magnificent passenger pigeon, common and remarkable sight of the nineteenth century, is gone forever.

—Mildred Murdoch



What Strange Powers Did The Ancients Possess?



EVERY important discovery relating to mind power, sound thinking and cause and effect, as applied to self-advancement, was known centuries ago, before the masses could read and write.

Much has been written about the wise men of old. A popular fallacy has it that their secrets of personal power and successful living were lost to the world. Knowledge of nature's laws, accumulated through the ages, is never lost. At times the great truths possessed by the sages were hidden from unscrupulous men in high places, but never destroyed.

Why Were Their Secrets Closely Guarded?

Only recently, as time is measured; not more than twenty generations ago, less than 1/100th of 1% of the earth's people were thought capable of receiving basic knowledge about the laws of life, for it is an elementary truism that knowledge is power and that power cannot be entrusted to the ignorant and the unworthy. Wisdom is not readily attainable by the general public; nor recognized when right within reach. The average person absorbs multitude of details about things, but goes through life without ever knowing where and how to acquire mastery of the fundamentals of the inner mind—that mysterious silent something which "whispers" to you from within.

Fundamental Laws of Nature

Your habits, accomplishments and weaknesses are the effects of causes. Your thoughts and actions are governed by fundamental laws. Example: The law of compensation is as funda-

mental as the laws of breathing, eating and sleeping. All fixed laws of nature are as fascinating to study as they are vital to understand for success in life.

You can learn to find and follow every basic law of life. You can begin at any time to discover a whole new world of interesting truths. You can start at once to awaken your inner powers of self-understanding and self-advancement. You can learn from one of the world's oldest institutions, first known in America in 1694. Enjoying the high regard of hundreds of leaders, thinkers and teachers, the order is known as the Rosicrucian Brotherhood. Its complete name is the "Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis," abbreviated by the initials "AMORC." The teachings of the Order are not sold, for it is not a commercial organization, nor is it a religious sect. It is a non-profit fraternity, a brotherhood in the true sense.

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RADIANT HEATING

By

ROBERT R. PELLONE

A TECHNIQUE as new as yesterday and as old as the Sun has come into being amidst the new developments in the heating of homes. In fact the oldest method of heating a dwelling or heating an exposed person is by the obvious means of exposing that dwelling or person to an open fire with only some means to carry away the gases from the flames. WHAT does the heating? The answer is simple. The energy radiated by the visible flame warms whatever is exposed to it.

This method of heating then has been used in open fireplaces, and in other devices to the satisfaction of all concerned. Later, as men developed new things, they devised central heating, using hot water, steam, or air to carry the heat to whatever was being heated. In the case of homes, this was ordinarily the air itself. In other words, conduction of heat through the air was the basic method of heating up until very recently.

Everyone knows that if you stand near a fire, or near a radiator carrying a hot gas or liquid, you can feel the heat from that radiator even though the air between it and you is still cold. How is this possible? In the first place it must be remembered that heat is nothing but the motion of the molecules of a substance be it flesh, wood, metal or stone. That is the aspect in which heat ordinarily appears to us. We feel an object, and we know it is warm because its molecules are in motion. If we want to make it warmer we must speed up these same molecules. The obvious way is to bring it into contact with something whose molecules are even moving faster. Then our new object becomes warmer. That's what is ordinarily done in house heating. We bring hot air near us and thus we warm ourselves.

However we also notice that we can feel the heat of a flame at a distance. This is due to the fact that heat appears also in the form of radiant energy, in the form of electromagnetic waves which are invisible and only make themselves known to us by the fact that they heat us. This is the basis of the new radiant heating.

Instead of having exposed radiators, long lengths of piping are buried in the floors and walls of the home to be heated. The same basic sort of a heating plant, however, is still used. The only change is that the radiators have now become simple pipes. They send their energy to us directly without heating the intervening air. Thus the actual temperature of the air in a room so heated may be very low, but as long as this radiant energy reaches us, we believe and we are in fact—warm. This new system will be used extensively in the future. Already it is being installed in many new homes.

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WARNING ALL SCIENTISTS

A NEW book has come to the attention of the public which carries a profound warning for all of us—particularly the scientists of America. The title of the book is "Alsos" by Dr. Goudsmit, an American physicist of Dutch extraction. The name "Alsos" comes from the Greek word "grove" and refers to Major-General Grove of the atomic bomb project. It was a code name applied to a special committee of American scientists whose function was to rush into Germany immediately after our troops had ferreted out all atomic secrets that the Germans had as well as to capture all German physicists that it could. Dr. Goudsmit headed the unit because he had known most of the German physicists before the war and in general was familiar with the European scene.

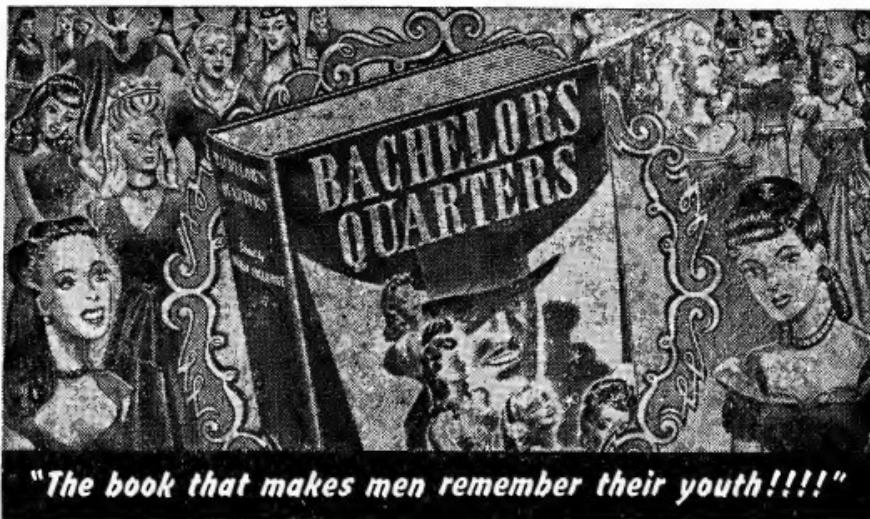
Before we entered Germany, our government believed, as many people even believe today, that we were racing the Germans for the atomic bomb. Dr. Goudsmit makes it clear that this is not a fact. The Germans were not even remotely close. At no time were we ever in danger of being atomic-bombed by the Germans. The important thing is that we expected it!

In his book Dr. Goudsmit tells a sorry tale—but fortunate for us. The highly vaunted science of the Germans proved to be nothing at all. German science was not even near the atomic bomb when the war ended and the reason was simple. German scientists were so confident that if they couldn't make the bomb nobody could! They were so stupid as to believe that they were even far ahead of us. They were shocked beyond belief that we had it when they heard that it had been dropped on Hiroshima.

The lesson in all this and in Dr. Goudsmit's book is very clear. We must never allow our scientific attitude to become one of cockiness. We must always have an open mind. No matter what we think, we must adopt the attitude that we don't know it all and that there are some things we can learn regardless of how smart we think we are. It is impossible for us to assume that because the United States has the atomic bomb, no one else can ever have it. The Germans had this view—look at the result.

On one occasion, Dr. Goudsmit and his colleagues discovered that the Germans had collected large quantities of thorium. Immediately he assumed the Germans were planning to use it for the atomic bomb. Imagine his surprise and relief when he learned that in fact they were using it in a special toothpaste!

Fortunately American scientists are too humble and intelligent to believe that they know it all, and consequently they work all the harder to apply reason to things. But it would be a mistake to assume that such fantastic things couldn't happen here. All you have to do is underestimate the caliber of your enemy and you are lost. The Germans did so, fortunately. —A. Morris



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AMAZING STORIES will publish in each issue a selection of letters from readers. Everybody is welcome to contribute. Bouquets and brickbats will have an equal chance. Inter-reader correspondence and controversy will be encouraged through this department. Get in with the gang and have your say.



Address Your Letters to:

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VOICE OUT OF NOWHERE

Sirs:

In the AMAZING STORIES for August I read with interest your letter telling about the bug or worm living in the brain that causes dros to act the way they do.

From 1941 to 1945 I was married and lived and worked at McGill, Nevada. From time to time another personality that called herself Jala Shan spoke through my wife, Betty. Jala said she was a daughter of Damballah and her sign was a bird flying into the sunset. Jala told me many things—mostly things I could neither prove or disprove. Jala said at that time that someone

infected Betty with worms in her brain to either kill her or drive her insane. After a struggle Jala Shan claimed to have destroyed these bugs. During this time Betty was upset and not perfectly well.

In 1944 we moved to Vancouver, Washington, and about a year later I returned to Nevada and secured a divorce. The last I heard Betty was married again and living at Seattle.

From numerous sources there is much to prove that your stories have a basis in fact. At one time, about 1939, I was in touch with the Lemurian Order, whose leaders, Robert D. Stelle and Howard Zitko, spoke of retreating to the

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caves. Also of changes in a radio set to make it an invulnerable weapon of defense and offense. Then there is the Brotherhood of the White Temple of 1600 Logan Street, Denver, Colorado, owned and operated by Dr. Doreal and Dr. Ramaose. This is another order that tells tall stories of giants, underground cities of the pyramid of magnetic fire that always points toward the Sun on a magnetic belt deep in the earth and many tales that stretch the imagination. They, too, seek to capture one's mind and imagination.

Perhaps you already have too many letters to answer so I'll bring this one to a close until some other time.

C. H. Spaulding,
Box 1223,
Warrenton, Oregon.

What you say is quite interesting, and we thank you for this comment on an actual experience which seems to support Mr. Shaver's information from the caves concerning a parasite in the brain.

—Ed.

ANOTHER ANSWER TO STAR

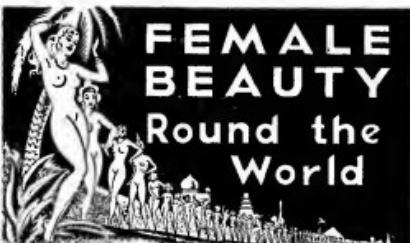
Sirs:

I have read with interest and much astonishment the letter signed by Marcial P. Star, of Lima, Peru, regarding my recent article "The Tunnels of the Titans," and published in the December issue of A. S. However, the letter consists of little more than a blanket charge that my article is "a pack of lies" and not a single authority, reference or scrap of evidence is offered to support his statements. He attempts to speak not only for every inhabitant of his country, living and dead, but the entire history of that ancient land which all scholars admit is bewildering and confusing.

I do not pose as an authority or historian. Although my historical articles have appeared in some twenty national publications and have been repeatedly checked by expert research staffs and found accurate, I prefer to regard myself simply as a reporter—one who collects from little-known sources and then presents to his readers interesting information.

In my article I plainly and repeatedly stated, even to the extent of a special footnote, that my material on the tunnels of Peru was taken from the book *Mysteries of Ancient South America*, by Harold T. Wilkins (London, 1945), and used by special arrangement with the author. Every statement regarding the tunnels (with the exception to follow) that I made will be found in this book.

Who is Harold T. Wilkins? If Mr. Star will turn to *Who's Who*, he will find that Mr. Wilkins is an internationally known authority, has done extensive work in South American archaeology and in British, Spanish and American historical archives, and is the author of thirty books that may be found in libraries throughout the world. Associated with Mr. Wilkins in his work is Miles Poindexter, whose studies on the mysteries and



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pre-history of the old Inca Empire have made him famous all over the countries of the Andes, and won him the Gold Medal of the Sun of Peru.

From such a source did I obtain my material, which I simply reported. Now, taking up Mr. Star's objections point by point, he first suggests that my spelling of the name of Pizzaro indicates my ignorance. It happens that I used the spelling adopted in England since I was using a book published in England. The spelling of historical names varies greatly from place to place, and all are considered correct. For Mr. Star's enlightenment, there are 4,000 ways of spelling the name of Shakespeare, according to Robert Ripley, and all are correct. It depends on what country you are in.

Next comes the dogmatic statement: "There are no such tunnels in Peru and never has the government looked for them." It happens that the governmental search was made in 1830, and the matter was reported by Mme. Helena Blavatsky in 1850, some twenty years later. Since that time, over a century ago, many governments have come and gone, and records have probably been destroyed. But this information was common knowledge back in 1850 when it was recorded. As Mr. Wilkins remarks, we are telling the modern government of Peru something that it likely does not know about, or if it does, it is keeping this knowledge from its citizens and the world for obvious reasons. To be more exact, Mr. Star, all nations have their secrets; our own country is not giving its citizens the know-how of making A-bombs.

As to the existence of the tunnels, please reread the letter by Marx Kaye, also of Lima, Peru, which appeared in the June issue of this magazine. Not only has Mr. Kaye been told "again and again by natives and some foreign investigators that there are subterranean passages in the neighborhood of Cuzco which are still guarded," but he tells of a miner who entered one of them. He also states that it is known "that the Incas had secret ways of traveling great distances underground." It would be logical to debate the size of these tunnels, perhaps, despite the fact that there are charts in existence, but to deny that any exist at all is closing one's eyes to the evidence.

Regarding the treasure of Atapualpa, (read *La Cronica del Peru* (circa A.D. 1555), by Pedro Cieza De Leon. It is true that minor collections of treasure went in lakes as well as elsewhere; we are concerned, however, with the basic treasure which included the original Inca golden sun as well as the fundamental source of the gold. I did not imply in my article that the charts I referred to, place the beginning of one of the tunnel's near the modern city of Lima, and I stated this fact so that the reader could determine its location.

As to the escape of Tupac Amaru in 1533, I refer Mr. Star to Mr. Wilkin's book; the reference to Maco Inca is another matter entirely. Regarding the jungles and the unexplored territory, Mr. Star fails to remember that all this happened four

centuries ago, and that the boundaries of South American countries have been changed repeatedly. Again, in reference to the noises during earthquakes, Mr. Star writes that he has "never heard them myself, nor anybody else." Well Mr. Kaye heard them, as his letter previously referred to, reveals.

Finally, Mr. Star writes: "Mr. Taylor Hansen tells always the same lies, but he tells them with ability, and I never had thought of discredit to him." In other words, if one can tell alleged lies with ability, he will not be forced to debate the issue. Well, some day I hope to have Mr. Hansen's ability.

In the meantime I hope my readers will realize that I am a reporter, not an authority, that I try to give references for most of my work and will answer all inquiries, and that I am dealing with knowledge that is not found in an atlas or a geography.

Vincent H. Gaddis

Box 296

Winona Lake, Indiana

Editorially, we agree with Mr. Gaddis. We have quite a bit of information of our own which confirms the existence of these tunnels, and we believe that the three rebuttals to Mr. Star which we have published have established their reality beyond any dispute.—Ed.

NOVEMBER ISSUE RATED

Sirs:

I have had the pleasure of reading the November issue of AMAZING. It was a swell issue and it was hard to rate the stories, but here is the lineup I finally arrived at:

1. And Eve Was—An immense scope of imagination and some real basic knowledge make this a real classic.

2. The Giants of Mogo—A difficult situation, the meeting of humans and Mogo giants. Well handled and with some fine philosophy. Something like this could happen.

3. Murder Solves a Problem—Written in a routine manner, but with a fine bunch of ideas and tremendous wallop at the end, that wasn't quite spoiled by the way it was done.

4. Squeeze Play—What an idea! The developments could be something.

R. P. Anger

520 Highland Ave.

Ottawa, Ontario, Can.

Thanks, Mr. Anger for your comments. We like to know that we are doing so well.—Ed.

SCIENCE FICTION AND MORMONISM

Sirs:

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themes which go hand in hand with religion and the attempt at storming the strongholds of mystery regarding the origin of man. I have read so many of the works of many authors and it is difficult for me to remember their names because I was more interested in the threads of truth than in names, people, and places.

Two writers just now stand out because, at last, in my way of thinking, they are hitting very near to the truth. First Shaver and then Rog Phillips. It almost appears to me that the prophets of earth long gone to Paradise, or other beings of immortal stature, are contacting some upon this earth in the form of inspired writings to reach the people. The Gospel of Christ reaches many people but there are so many outside the pale who have to be appealed to in other ways. I believe Shaver and Phillips are two of those inspired people so designated. I am not conferring any special honor upon these men but the world should note the continuity of thread of theme in their works. It seems that the world is being reached through these men in mysterious ways and only the searcher of truth can understand and follow through. I am sure that there are many people in my position.

I would refer your readers to the letter of George Haycock, page 174, October, 1947, AMAZING STORIES in his reference to certain caverns. If I could remember specific authors and works, but I cannot. But I do refer you to the articles and other works having to do with the origin of man upon this continent. Through the archeological works thus read, the combination of these so-called threads of truth began to develop and constantly when Mormon missionaries approached me some years ago I began to see further into these truths.

Rog Phillips' work "And Eve Was," November, 1947, AMAZING STORIES, strengthens further truth; and I wonder if Rog Phillips is of Mormon faith for the general theme of this story is somewhat comparable to our philosophy of the origin of man.

I owe to scientific fiction and its works one of the real reasons why I became a Mormon. Science is the search for truth, and true religion is truth, and the two go hand in hand. The religion I refer to is not man made or of any other concept except what the world refers to as Mormonism.

I would like to invite comments from other readers, especially those of the Mormon faith, and learn if they have discovered the same themes of truth that I have. I would also like to know if Rog Phillips is of my faith? I do know that one of the authors of scientific fiction is of the Mormon faith and have seen mention of this fact in one of our periodicals some time ago.

There is a connection between the scientific mysteries of the ancient ancestors of the Incas, Aztecs, and sister or descending peoples; this theme also connects to the themes of ancient Atlantis, Lemuria, and I refer to *Tunnels of the Titans* by

Vincent H. Gaddis, August AMAZING STORIES. And here again, as we have dealt in the past, we find both past and future glory in "And Eve Was." In this writing there is a great promise to those who wonder what comes after this life of mortality. The promise is sufficiently hidden so that the chosen may find it only. Another by Rog Phillips, "So Shall Ye Reap," August AMAZING STORIES, portrays a warning. I wonder how many readers have seen it.

Mormonism teaches the eternal life of man, as given by the prophecies of authorized servants of God down through the ages. The record is also plain and this source of truth, available to all, is sadly ignored. Scientific fiction has almost been an equally great source of truth, particularly AMAZING STORIES. I wonder how many readers can see the connection that I do between science and religion.

Before I close I would refer you to the flying saucers which have been publicized so much. Keep up with the work of scientific fiction and AMAZING STORIES, exhort Rog Phillips and Richard S. Shaver to keep on giving. I feel that in their works there is a message for all men. There are just as many stumbling blocks in scientific works for the unfit as in scripture.

One more request. Is there an author who can furnish a feature fiction article, on the possibility of ancient peoples of this continent being emigrants from the Tower of Babel and others from Hebrew lineage around 600 B. C.? You editors, how about putting out a feeler? I think something marvelous will come forth for all men. Shaver and Phillips ought to work hand in hand on this project.

Some assertions of this letter are strong, and stand as challenges to many. I would like to see discussions on this theme of identical threads of scientific fiction and in the realm of religion.

Norman E. Brourten
Box 41
Randolph, Vermont

No, Mr. Phillips is not a Mormon. But we believe he is a believer in a Creator, and actually adheres to no particular faith. We are much interested in your comments on the connection between science and religion, and feel flattered to have our authors called "messengers from Paradise."—Ed.

OKAY, WE WILL!

Sirs:

When I was in the hospital after the birth of my child, I read the first issue of AMAZING STORIES containing the "Shaver Mystery." Next month, it will have been three years. Don't you think it about time that something more concrete than claims were brought out, or else call a halt to the whole thing?

I have been keeping notes on this "mystery." What of all these people who claim they are going to explore this cave or that area? For example, you yourselves would have made a personal in-

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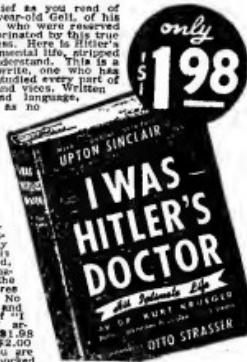
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vestigation of the Mendocino County area. What of V.G. of San Francisco, California, who was going to leave for Mendocino on May 20, 1946, after making elaborate preparations? Did he ever get there? You offered to correct the statements of James E. Wright of Louisville, Ky., if they were false, yet you did neither this nor did you confirm them. You promised to raise money to explore the cave of Fred L. Crisman, Tacoma, Washington. There are many other notes which are left unfinished. How much longer does this go on? Your readers are as confused now as they were almost three years ago. Surely, you have enough proof now to interest a reputable scientific group in your findings. If this is a hoax, don't you think it's time to quit?

I won't be looking for this letter in the magazine because I'm quite sure you won't print it—but, I will be looking for results!

Did Norman S. Kossuth really ask the Detroit dero, Steve, those questions? The March issue mentioned it but didn't give particulars. What did Mr. Shaver say about the sketch of the rollat?

Mrs. Alton Burd
11 Mandi Avenue
Trenton, N. J.

Next month we'll have some proof. We have published several reports on explorations of the Mendocino area. They varied. Several saw strange things, felt strange powers, heard strange voices, and others saw nothing, not even a cave. V. G. confessed his letter was a hoax, and we published his confession. You may have missed these letters. James E. Wright's cave never was confirmed, but CHMBS visited him, and he refused to take them there. Cross that off. Crisman also refused to say more, except that he went to Alaska to find this cave, and his buddy was killed in the search. Cross that off. Kossuth asked the dero those questions, and got answers that told us nothing new. Mr. Shaver shrugged his shoulders at the rollat drawing. Maybe, maybe not. But he never saw any quite like that.—Ed.

LETTER TO MR. SHAVER

Sirs:

I was a little afraid when I began to write this letter, but I would sincerely like you to know a couple of things.

First of all, I am very familiar with the different types of crank letters sent to AMAZING STORIES and *Fantastic*. They all begin something like this, "Don't you think that this 'Shaver Thing' has gone far enough?", and go on with a lot of mumble jumble that the average citizen does not understand. (At least I consider myself an average citizen.)

I do not profess to be overly brilliant, nor do I understand your stories 100 percent. But this does not make them less enjoyable or understandable to me, or to the thousands of others beside me.

To tell the very frank truth, about the only reason that I eagerly await every issue of AMAZING

or *Fantastic*, is because there might be some of your work in them.

Recently I received a letter from a supposedly powerful Anti-Shaver Club, or that's what I gathered it to be. A sort of club trying to outlaw your work. They asked my support (inasmuch as they asked for a donation and asked me to sign a petition which they would use to force the editors to refuse all your work). It all seemed very stupid to me, and it still seems the same, but they weren't very nice in the choice of language they used. They called you everything from a moron to a jerk with a money making idea. Well Mr. Shaver, I am only a G.I. and I know that what I write must seem bad grammar and all the rest, but I'd like you to know that as one of your very pleased fans, I just wanted you to know that I admire your work very much and I look forward to reading your work for years and years.

Tec 5 R. Garskof RA 42278967
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Fort George Meade, Md.

Judge people by what they do. This seems to be a very unethical thing, and we appreciate your attitude regarding it. Just pay no attention to such crackpots. Besides, we buy stories on their merit, and no threats or petitions by such as these would influence us.—Ed.

RE: LEMURIA

Sirs:

Re Lemuria: In F.A. for October, 1945, volume 7, number 4, the article "Lost Civilization" inside the back cover contains a brief map showing the position of Lemuria as being in the Pacific, from China, Japan down towards South America.

But a book that I have states differently. The book is "Esoteric Buddhism," by A. P. Sinnett, second edition, published in 1883 by Trubner and Co. of Ludgate Hill, London (England).

From Chapter IV, "The World Periods," I take a piece from page 55, first six lines, (all this griff in case you can get a copy to check with).

Quote—"Lemuria, (a former continent stretching southward from India across what is now the Indian Ocean but connected with Atlantis as Africa was not then in existence) should no more be confounded with the Atlantis continent than Europe with America."

There then follows a lengthy converse on where the Lemurians and Atlantians, left alive after the destruction of the lands, went to carry on their race.

The quoted section above covers my query, was Lemuria in the Pacific or Indian Ocean?

Richard Wilde
31 Elbury Avenue
Kingswood, Bristol,
England

Thanks very much for this information. We pass it on to our readers. Perhaps some of them will comment on it.—Ed.

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